

# Against *the* Current

Spring, 1982  
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**OPEC: The Big Cartel That Couldn't**

**THE CRISIS OF MAOISM**

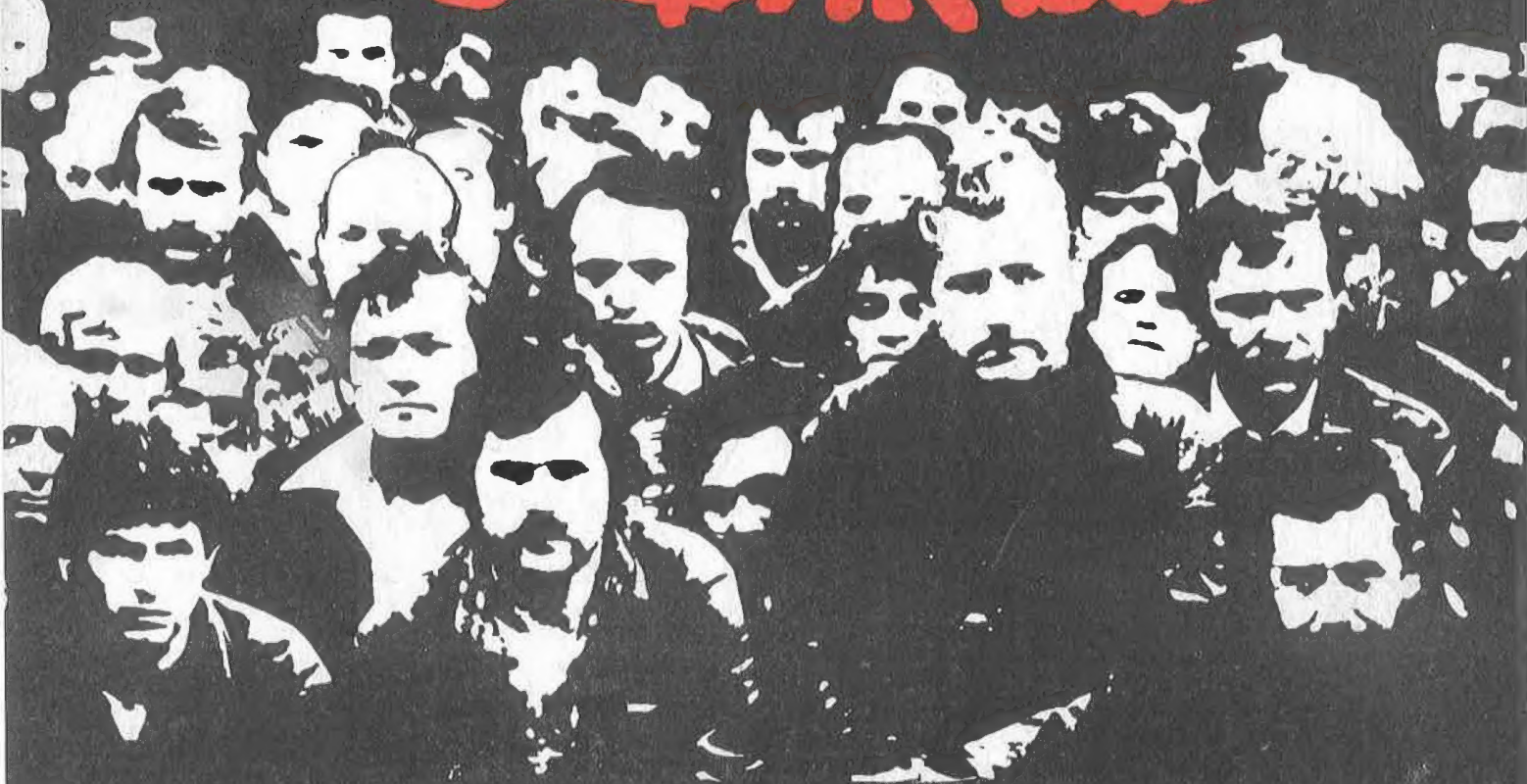
**WOMEN, THE RIGHT & THE FAMILY**

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**The winter is yours, but the spring will be ours**

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\*"The winter is yours, but the spring will be ours" is a slogan now circulating in Poland.



# **Against the** Current

a socialist quarterly magazine sponsored by Workers Power

Spring 1982

Vol. 1, No. 4

**Reform, Revolution and Repression  
in Poland**

*The Editors*

4

**OPEC: The Big Cartel that Couldn't...**

*Bob Fitch*

16

**Mandel on Althusser  
Party and Class**

23

**Women, the Right and the Family**

*Johanna Brenner*

28

**PATCO**

*The Editors*

33

**The TDU Convention – And the Fight  
Against Give-Backs**

*Steve Zeluck*

35

**On Being a Union Official**

*Stan Heller*

40

**In Memoriam**

44

**Informal Work Groups:  
Invisible Power in the Workplace**

*Sam Friedman & Stan Weir*

45

**The Crisis of Maoism  
Part II**

*Richard Smith*

49

**Letter to the Editor**

61

**Editors**

Robert Brenner  
Steve Zeluck

**Editorial Associates**

Alice Amsden  
John Amsden  
Daniel Anker  
Eric Berg  
Carl Boggs  
Johanna Brenner  
Frank Brodhead  
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Myra Weiss  
Milton Zaslow



# REFORM, REVOLUTION, AND REPRESSION IN POLAND

by The Editors

**T**he military coup in Poland was a severe blow to the socialist and working class movement the world over. But even before the coup, the Polish workers movement faced a profound impasse. Their movement had amassed enormous power and authority within society. The rule of the Polish bureaucracy had been almost entirely discredited. Were the contending forces in Poland alone to decide the issue, the working class certainly had the strength to break the old regime and take state power.\*

But, of course, the fate of the Polish revolution did not lie in the hands of the Poles alone. The Soviet Union remained a factor of enormous weight in the political equation. Had the working class moved to take state power in Poland, the Soviet Union almost certainly would have intervened to try to reverse their action. As a consequence, broad layers within the Solidarity leadership and rank and file ruled out in advance calling for the seizure of state power; for the potential costs of a Soviet intervention made this an unthinkable option for them. As one member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party smugly remarked, "Solidarity can take power any time it chooses. Yet it cannot." Solidarity therefore saw little alternative but to forsake the idea of seizing state

power and to adopt an approach which called for "limiting the revolution".

Nevertheless, the strategy of "limiting the revolution" itself posed enormous dangers, for the revolutionary process has a dynamic of its own. It is characteristic of revolutionary situations—and Poland was a revolutionary situation *par excellence*—that the rising movement views every victory as a sign of its own power to win more. In a revolutionary situation, the achievement of reforms does nothing to bring credit to the old regime—does nothing to verify reformist perspectives—but only strengthens the resolve of the workers to go further. Yet, after a time, so many reforms have been won and so much power has accrued to the working class, that the old regime can no longer guarantee the normal functioning of society (nor does it wish to, given the strength of the workers). At this point, the revolution

\* For a fuller analysis of the origin of the workers' upsurge in Poland, and the built-in contradictions in Polish society, see the article in ATC, Winter 1981.



begins to exact increasing costs from the people for decreasingly palpable gains, in the short run. In this situation, either the movement consummates the revolution and seizes power, if only to secure the day-to-day existence of the people; or the revolution begins to be consumed by its own fire and risks going down to defeat.

Just such conditions were obtained in Poland by the summer of 1981. The ruling bureaucracy which hitherto

step to construct a new socialist order within the heart of the old, but they might take these fateful actions without fully considering their political repercussions, especially the likely response of the state. This possibility, in fact, materialized, when the working people in Poland, through countless mass initiatives from below, began, in the summer and fall of 1981, to construct with their own bare hands so to speak, a self-managed economy . . . but



Women shipyard workers, Gdansk.

Picture by Lynne Jones, London

had administered all aspects of Polish society was close to breakdown. As a result of the strength of Solidarity in the factories, the economy was paralyzed. Under pressure from the movement at all levels of administration, the apparatus could no longer effectively operate even the institutions of national and local government. In response to the universal crisis and chaos, the mass movement daily became more radical and revolutionary, ultimately adopting a program of self-management of the economy and free elections to parliament and to workers assemblies. At the same time, the bureaucracy had decreasing reason to be concerned with the social disintegration. For as Solidarity grew in strength politically, socio-economic problems could be laid increasingly at its door. Solidarity therefore appeared to have little choice but to seize power, simply in order to avoid risking the disintegration of the movement. For if it did not, masses of people might not just tire of the sacrifices of the revolution, but join in blaming Solidarity for them. To an extent, this actually began to occur.

In this situation, if Solidarity failed to put forward a strategy for confronting the state, there was still another danger. People would feel themselves compelled to act on their own in order to save their revolution and to restore some semblance of decent life. They would move step by

without Solidarity's having made preparations to confront the coercive force of the bureaucracy. This was to invite disaster, and disaster came with the vicious premeditated repression of the movement by the Polish bureaucratic state and its armed forces.

This progression of events poses a series of profoundly difficult questions for Polish revolutionaries, and their supporters the world over. Can so deep a revolutionary movement as was developing in Poland proceed by half-measures? Is there a "middle way" for the Polish revolution? If the revolution is to limit itself, how can it hold on to the gains it has won and prevent the reconsolidation of the bureaucracy on the old basis? In other words, is it possible to limit the revolution without curbing the self-mobilization of the masses, thus undermining the only base of working class power, and inviting the restoration of bureaucratic rule. These are the questions we will address here.

## THE GROWTH OF WORKING CLASS POWER IN POLAND

Until the coup, the overriding creative factor which shaped every step, ushered in every stage, of the Polish revolution has been the working-class-in-motion. All



## Against the Current

other elements were essentially reactive. The mobilization of the Polish working class has been perhaps as broad and as deep as any in modern history. The outcome has been an extraordinary vindication of the fundamental Marxist notion of the capacity of the working class for self-emancipation—for constructing socialist ideals, practices, and structures out of its own experience in struggle.

There have been, of course, numerous contradictions, impurities—distortions if one wishes—in the development of the Polish movement. But this is hardly astonishing. Given the fact the working class was opposed to an all-dominant ruling bureaucracy which calls itself "Marxist" and "Communist", who could be surprised that there has been little recourse to the explicit language or theory of revolutionary socialism? Given the fact that "internationalism" for the Poles has consistently meant the right of the Soviet Union to protect its national interests by intervening to crush working class movements in Eastern Europe, and given also the fact that Polish history has for two hundred years been the history of the suppression of national rights and culture, who could be surprised that the movement has assumed a nationalist coloring? Given the fact the church, historically, has been associated with the struggle against foreign domination and since World War II has been the main opposition force tolerated by the regime, who can be surprised that Catholicism has become a symbol of resistance for the movement (although never a dominant force shaping its politics). Finally, given the fact that planning in Poland has been associated with top-down bureaucratic control, corruption, and mismanagement of the economy, who can be surprised that significant sections of the working class should combine anti-capitalist ideas and conceptions of workers self-management of the economy with illusions in the market? No doubt, their lack of connection to any actual revolutionary Marxist tradition or theory, their preoccupation with nationalism and the church, and their sometimes uncritical opposition to planning have put the Polish movement at a disadvantage. But what is truly astonishing and *decisive* has been the capacity of the rank and file workers to overcome the weakness of their ideological legacy and to transform a movement which emerged as a struggle for democracy in general into a revolution for socialism.

### The Emergence of the Movement

Of course, the movement did not come out of nowhere. It was objectively prepared so to speak, by 35 years of dictatorial rule by a bureaucracy which was imposed from the outside by the Russians and which dominated all aspects of society through its control of the state. The bureaucracy monopolized force; operated the economy through a "plan" devised and administered from the top; and curtailed basic freedoms, for the most part. It was the alienation of the working class from the ruling bureaucracy which constituted the economy's fundamental contradiction, and which provided the material basis for the long run tendency of the economy to stagnate. *Planning without democratic control by the working class* cannot work over the long run and it led in Poland to serious economic decay by the late 1960s. (for a fuller analysis of the economy, see ATC, #2)

The crisis was intensified by the bureaucracy's pro-

gram of the early 1970s to overcome economic decline by integrating Poland, in precipitate fashion, into the international capitalist market. Poland had the misfortune to enter the world market just as world capitalism was entering into its stagflationary downturn: the combination of high import prices and declining demand for Polish products led to a severe balance of payments problem. Poland's resulting indebtedness to the European and American banks led the government to impose the austerity measures which provoked the initial outbreak of the Polish revolt in the summer of 1980.

Over this same period, the working class had been preparing itself for its historic task starting with 1956, and especially in the great mass strike explosions of 1970-1 and 1976. It was typical of the evolving movement that it was rank and file workers from the North Sea region who originated the idea of independent unions in the later 1970s, while the intellectuals around KOR (Workers Self-Defense Organization) to whom they originally presented the notion were initially skeptical. Nonetheless, the intellectuals agreed to help with the project, and together they launched the *North Sea Worker*, the newspaper which became the main organizing vehicle for the movement. It was this experiment with independent though still formally illegal trade unions on the Baltic Coast which provided a model, as well as important organizing experiences, for the foundation of Solidarity.

The striking creativity and impetuosity of the working class in the long series of struggles from 1970 to the present is undoubtedly, to an important degree, a function of its youth, both economically and sociologically. In its great majority, the working class was the creation of the industrialization drive of the post-war era. The economy and working class which emerged from this era was typical of the early phases of the industrial revolution, especially in that it was concentrated in heavy industry and in huge factories. It has been the giant units of production at the core of the economy—the North Sea shipyards, the Warsaw steel and tractor plants, the mines and factories of Silesia—which have constituted the spearhead of the movement.

At the same time, an extraordinary percentage of today's working class is still quite young, between the ages of 25 and 35, and they have come to maturity since the late 1960s. These years witnessed the decay of what had been in, relative terms, the ideologically-motivated, iron-fisted, and highly repressive rule of the Gomulka government, and the emergence of the ideologically void, cynical, corrupt and relatively lenient bureaucracy of the Giersek regime, (lenient, because it wisely feared the working class). Workers came to expect jail terms of only days or months for political and economic offenses which had hitherto quite commonly brought jail terms of years. Under such conditions, they could much more easily develop habits of resistance and defiance, as well as a growing disdain for the state authorities.

### The Rising Tide

From the moment of its outbreak in July 1980, the Polish revolt assumed an increasingly revolutionary character. Its demands moved swiftly from the economic to the political and back again. It did not confine itself to one or another sectional interest, but sought to represent



the class as a whole. It not only won one after another demand from the bureaucracy, but by extraordinary persistence and self organization, forced their implementation. The movement's mass base was consistently ahead of the leadership (although the leadership's "backwardness" was, to a significant degree self-imposed, a point to which we shall have to return). Finally, the movement ultimately constructed, in the course of struggle, *its own project* for workers' self-management of the economy and society as a whole.

The summer strike wave of 1980 began over the demand for wage increases to meet the announced increases in food prices, as well as to win the rehiring of Anna Walentinowicz a long time militant of the Baltic region. But the movement quickly expanded its program to include political demands for the freedom of the press, women's rights, access to TV by Solidarity and the church, freedom for political prisoners, and, of course, the right to independent trade unions. Even at this initial stage, the rank and file showed their determination and independence by rejecting their leadership's agreement to compromise with the authorities on the issue of freeing political prisoners. They sent their representatives back to the bargaining table and, in the end, forced the bureaucracy to accept their entire program.

Of course, the Gdansk Accords marked just the beginning, not the end, of the struggle. The logic of a revolutionary movement is always to build on its initial victories to increase in momentum, and no one understood this better than the ruling bureaucracy. The CP demanded that a clause asserting the "leading role of the Party" be inserted into Solidarity's founding charter. But a wave of wildcats and the threat of a national strike forced the Supreme Court to register Solidarity's charter with the objectionable clause left out.

Meanwhile, the movement was establishing its claim to represent Polish society as a whole. Shortly after the Gdansk agreements, workers of the ports and great factories struck to insure that the rights they had won would be extended to the strategically less-well-placed and less-well-organized sectors of the working class, such as the hospital workers, etc. By January 1981, moreover, Solidarity was backing strikes and protests across Poland to win recognition for the organization of the farmers, and to have this attached to the main union.

Indeed the bitter fight for Rural Solidarity represented one of the turning points of the entire conflict. When the government refused to recognize the farmers' union, Solidarity members in Bydgoszcz occupied the City Hall. They were brutally removed by the militia, and the main Bydgoszcz Solidarity leader Jan Rulewski, was badly beaten. This action provoked outrage throughout the working class. All negotiations with the government were suspended.

On March 27, 1981, four million Polish workers, acting as one, dropped their tools at 8 AM to initiate a four hour national strike. This massive action was to warn the bureaucracy that there would be an even greater general strike to come the following week, if the union's demands were not accepted—above all, that justice be done over the Bydgoszcz attacks. The extraordinary discipline and near-universal support for the walkout clearly shook the government. However, with the working class on the verge of explosion, Lech Walesa moved *unilaterally* to cancel the general strike, and he personally came to a

compromise agreement with the bureaucracy. Solidarity's ranks were furious with Walesa, and he was severely chastened at the subsequent conference. But a residue of distrust for the Solidarity leadership remained, which only grew over time.

As the workers' power grew the profoundly democratic and egalitarian thrust which motivated the movement deepened. When Solidarity headquarters in Warsaw were raided in November 1980, and two Solidarity leaders were arrested, the movement demanded that the police be put under the control of the whole people. All over the country, local struggles were carried out to remove corrupt and abusive officials from their posts in factories and municipalities. Demands were made that sports facilities, hospitals, special stores, villas, etc., which had been the special preserve of party officials, be placed under the control of the workers. Finally, the workers began to infringe on the bureaucracy's monopoly of economic distribution by demanding—and attempting to assure by direct action—that scarce goods be given to the people rather than exported.

## Resolving the Crisis through Workers-Self Management

The rising movement in Poland thus revealed the historic interconnections between workers-self activity, workers power, and workers creativity. With every new phase of the struggle, the workers' mobilization demonstrated to the workers themselves their own strength; as the workers amassed greater power, new options, hitherto inconceivable, appeared possible, *because they really were*. As the revolution developed, no obstacle appeared too large: the workers became open to, seized upon, indeed invented, the most radical solutions. A truly revolutionary transformation now appeared not only necessary and desirable, but for the first time actually attainable.

The deepening economic crisis and the bureaucracy's intensified exploitation had precipitated the workers' initial explosion into struggle in 1980. The workers' original response was simply a protest, a "no" to the government. But as they took up arms, so to speak, and actually began to prevail over their oppressors, they came to see not only the need for lifting their oppression, but the possibility of creating a *positive* resolution to the crisis on their own terms, in their own way—through operating the economy and the society as a whole through a system of workers self-management.

Possibility became necessity as the economy tailspinned into chaos, especially as Solidarity's growing power disrupted and demoralized the bureaucracy. By the summer of 1981, the Polish economy was experiencing its worst crisis ever. Over the period of the revolt, the national income had dropped by perhaps 25%, and the government estimated that by December 1981, personal consumption would have fallen by a third, in less than three years. The government's response was two-fold. It announced the rationing of basics like cigarettes, sugar, etc. It raised food prices several fold. The working class responded with a torrent of strikes, in which 250,000 workers at a time were often in the streets.

The giant wave of strikes of the summer and fall of 1981 marked a decisive step forward in the Polish



## Against the Current

masses' attempt to take history into their own hands. At first blush, the strike appeared—especially to certain left critics outside Poland—"irresponsible", counterproductive, and an expression of militancy for its own sake. Did the workers not realize that "strikes do not produce food," that it was necessary to cooperate and compromise with the government so as to restore production, in order to solve the crisis? But what these critics ignored of course, was that the economic crisis had long preceded the strikes; that the crisis had arisen from the very nature of the bureaucratically-run Polish economy; and that the crisis could not be solved if management of the economy was left in the hands of the ruling bureaucracy. What these critics ignored above all was that while the strikes, *in themselves*, could not resolve the crisis, *strikes could and did begin to create the indispensable political conditions to make a solution possible*—by radically enhancing the power of the working class and its potential for transforming society. Thus, the strikes of the summer and fall of 1981 provided the sense of power required to confront the enormously imposing task of actually developing and implementing a plan to deal with the crisis—*by remaking Polish society*.

It was through this series of strikes that a program to resolve the economic crisis emerged. It took shape, more or less, in two stages. First, there arose the call for "direct action strikes". In these actions, the strikers would continue production, but take charge of it directly, and oversee the distribution of the output. Gregory Palka, Deputy Chairman of the Regional Committee at Lodz, explained the idea of "direct action strikes", at a meeting of Solidarity's leadership last July, as follows:

We may decide to go on strike for more food, but the government will have no food to give us. What then? A few days into a strike the question will arise, "What next?". There will be no food to win because the government will not have any. To continue the strike would make no sense at all since it would mean self-induced starvation. On the other hand, to call off the strike would be a total defeat for the union. This type of situation would require a different approach.

This is why I suggest that we should work out the technical details of an emergency "direct action strike".

We need to know what to do if after two days of a general strike, the government has nothing to give us.

Meanwhile, the workers in the largest factories were taking responsibility for actually working out a longer run plan. Fourteen hundred plants sent representatives to what they called The Network, an organization whose explicit purpose was to create a program to run the economy. It is notable that, at first, the Solidarity leadership shied away from The Network and its program, fearing it would be considered too provocative by the bureaucracy and the Soviet Union. But under enormous pressure from the mass strike movement, Solidarity adopted the essentials of the Network's program calling for workers self-management of the economy as a whole at Solidarity's National Congress in September-October 1981. In addition, they sought free elections to Parliament and People's Councils.

Even before Solidarity formally adopted this program, workers were already putting this program into effect in piecemeal fashion. They were kicking out plant managers, demanding that many more be dismissed, and taking direct action to run production and distribution. The workers were challenging the bureaucracy's power over society with all the risks that entailed.

The growing radicalization of the movement was further expressed by the direct appeal for support to the movement addressed to the Russian troops stationed in Poland, by the Solidarity newspaper of Wroclaw. The workers of the Warsaw W.S.K. factory sent out a similar call to their comrades of the Likhatchev factory in Moscow. Solidarity emphasized its revolutionary trajectory when it took the extraordinary step of calling for Independent Trade Unions throughout the Eastern Bloc.

But in moving toward revolution, the working class only intensified to the breaking point the need to confront and break beyond the dilemma which we described at the start of this article. The workers were challenging the bureaucracy's power over society. Yet, in the background, the threat of the Russians lurked larger than ever. What strategy was there to overcome this defining dilemma of the Polish revolution?



Popular poster displayed in Poland after the CP Conference in summer of '81 and the subsequent raising of food prices: "First effect of the Communist Party Conference—cut in rations, starvation."

## STRATEGIC OPTIONS BEFORE THE MOVEMENT

### Reform From Within: Transforming the CP

When the Polish workers rose in 1956 and 1970, significant numbers hoped a solution could be found in the reform of the bureaucratically-controlled CP. Moreover, on each of these occasions, the new group which took over the government—around Gomułka in 1956 and Gierek in 1970—pledged to carry out far-reaching programs which would have brought significant increases



in workers control over the system and in political liberties. Nevertheless, each time, once the pressure of the workers on the bureaucracy had been dispersed through cooptation and repression, the bureaucracy swiftly reneged on its promises and returned the situation to the *status quo ante*.

By 1980, few in Poland could have been optimistic about reforming the CP. Nevertheless, the CP still did, of course, contain thousands of rank and file workers, and it was inconceivable that the profound social crisis and the accompanying political ferment would not affect them. Thus, many CP rank and filers either joined Solidarity or were deeply affected by Solidarity's conceptions. It was natural that they would make a sincere attempt to win the Party over, in hopes of heading off the otherwise inevitable confrontation.

Indeed, a genuine rank and file workers movement, "The Horizontal Movement", emerged within the CP in the period of preparation for the special emergency congress of the Party in the summer of 1981. This movement, which appears to have been initiated by one Zbigniew Ivanov in Torun, quickly spread to Lodz, Poznan, and other cities. It demanded an end to the sacrosanct top-down hierarchy through which the bureaucracy governs the CP; it attempted to replace the apparatus with "horizontal" structures more responsive to the base; it attempted to weaken the barriers that seal off the party cells from one another and the rest of society, and, in general, it demanded a democratization of the party, especially the broad application of the principle of elections, rather than appointments. For a brief moment, in fact, it appeared that this movement might have a chance.

Nevertheless, hopes of reform were dashed with each passing day of the Congress. Despite the unprecedented degree to which formal democracy and openness were introduced into the proceedings, the Congress turned out to be about the reconsolidation of the hold of the bureaucracy, not the renewal of the Party. The party moved to expel Bratkowski, head of the journalists union, and Bogdan Lis, a prominent worker-leader of Gdansk Solidarity. Then, it squelched the attempt to win election to the central committee by reform liberals like Fiszbach, secretary of the Gdansk CP. It is true that a few hardliners also lost their positions. But the slight shift in the center of gravity within the Party which resulted (if shift there was), combined with the strengthening of the representatives of the army inside the Party which also took place, were hardly signs of a thoroughgoing desire for transformation. Symbolic of the whole process, Ivanov, the animator of "Horizontal Movement", was expelled from the Party and turned up next as a representative from Gdansk at the Solidarity Congress in September. The rank and file worker members once more were forced to the conclusion of the CP was indeed unsalvageable.

If any doubts remained, they were laid to rest with the mass expulsion of workers by the CP. By October 1981, 181,000 had been formally expelled, and 244,000 had resigned. These are the CP's figures, but they are not very reliable. For the CP dared not hold a re-registration of its worker members, for fear it would have revealed how few workers remained loyal to the party. The final blow to the hopes of reforming the CP came when 15 Central Committee members resigned, as directed, from Solidarity, and called on other CPers to leave as well. The

chasm had become, formally and definitively, unbridgeable.

The failure of the Horizontal Movement, the results of the CP Congress, and the mass expulsions and resignation which took place throughout the year, hammered home a point we made in ATC, #2. The Polish CP, like the CPs of the other so-called Socialist Societies, are not in the possession of their memberships, to be used for purposes to be decided upon by those members. In particular, the idea of any throughgoing democratization of the Party for the purpose of winning it to an ideal of socialism, i.e. workers self-government, is out of the question because it is contrary to the Party's very function. The CP must be understood as the special instrument for securing the domination of the ruling bureaucracy over the society as a whole, and it has been shaped for that purpose. Thus, the CP, by its very nature, must function as a top down machine responsible to the rulers at the top. Should it cease to do so, they would have to create another one. It follows that for the bureaucracy to sit by and allow a more than formal reform of the CP which could make the CP serve the working class would have been tantamount to the bureaucracy's presiding over its own self-dissolution. For the point of the revolution in Poland, in the eyes of the working class, was to bring power to the working class. To the bureaucracy this meant decay and destruction of the bureaucracy itself (for further analysis of the ruling bureaucracy in Poland, see ATC, #2).

## Sharing Power with the Bureaucracy: Walesa's Strategy

The dominant group in the leadership of Solidarity pursued a course of action designed to head off a confrontation with the bureaucracy in favor of at least temporary accommodation with it. This group cohered around Lech Walesa, who emerged as the authoritative leader of the movement during the struggle at Gdansk in the summer of 1980. There is no reason to doubt that this group is subjectively hostile to the regime and would have wished to overthrow it. But they felt that in view of the threat from the Russians, there was no choice but to come to an agreement whereby Solidarity shared power with the bureaucracy. Otherwise, the Russians would intervene and the ensuing bloodletting would be horrendous. Thus, the project of Walesa was summed up in the so-called tri-partite accord, by which the CP, the Church, and Solidarity would jointly govern. It was toward this goal that Walesa pursued negotiations with the government throughout the length of the struggle.

The political assumptions of Walesa and his associates led them to adopt incipiently bureaucratic attitudes to the mass movement—attitudes of paternalism and substitutionism. Because of the masses' ostensible lack of realism, it was thought necessary, at the time, to ignore them, manipulate them, or go around them—"in their own interests". Time and again, as noted earlier, Walesa and his colleagues in the Solidarity leadership, moved unilaterally to head off rank and file workers' actions in order to avoid what they thought would be a destructive confrontation.

Walesa's position was ostensibly rooted in "realism". It was, indeed, founded on a simple syllogism. (1) If we



## Against the Current

don't come to an agreement guaranteeing the integrity of the Polish bureaucracy, the Russians sooner or later will intervene and there will be bloodshed. (2) We don't want bloodshed. (3) Ergo, we must have the tripartite agreement, for it is the only way to proceed, without threatening the bureaucracy's power.

Yet, for the Polish working class—which time and again rebuked Walesa, and in the final months repudiated his entire approach—there was another iron-clad logic which was far more compelling. (1) The bureaucracy will never share authority at the top with Solidarity, so long as the working class is mobilized at the base; for such mobilization inhibits the tendency of some Solidarity leaders to be coopted, weakens the bureaucracy's position, and stands as a permanent threat to the bureaucracy's rule. (2) In order to get the sharing of authority at the top, the working class will therefore sooner or later, have to cease its self-mobilization (or the CP would never agree). (3) If the workers give up their mobilization from below, they will dissolve the only basis for working class interests in the society. (4) Thus, either a tri-partite agreement will be unattainable, or if attained it must serve as a cover for the consolidation of the bureaucracy's rule and Solidarity's disappearance as a power in society.

It was of course, Walesa, and not the rank and file of Solidarity, who was revealed as the utopian—and this was evident well before the Army coup. For, as it turned out, the CP showed itself actively interested in the tripartite power sharing plan only at the extreme high points of workers mobilization and pressure, when it seemed that tactical concessions were unavoidable. Even at those junctures, the CP insisted on putting such limits on the agreement as to deprive their concessions of real substance, and thus make them unacceptable to the working class.

It was, therefore no accident that the tri-partite agreement seemed at closest confirmation at two pivotal junctures: first, in March 1981, following the Bydgoszcz events, in the wake of Solidarity's impressive 4-hour mass strike, and in the period leading up to the threatened unlimited general strike; second, in September 1981, following the first session of Solidarity's Congress, at which the movement had adopted its plan for workers self-management, free elections, etc. These were, obviously, moments at which the working class stood fully-organized and ready to move—and the Party felt it was the better part of valor to play for time. On the other hand, it is symptomatic that, in both cases, Walesa and his colleagues in the national leadership came to an agreement with the bureaucracy *in direct defiance of a policy which had been adopted by the national organization*. It is, finally, indicative of the real meaning of "power-sharing" in this instance that what the CP agreed to was: first, a minority presence for Solidarity in a National Government of Reconciliation, which would remain under the control of the Party; second, the workers right in some cases to veto plant managers, who would still be appointed by the CP (this right was not to extend to certain key industries, to be designated later). In other words, the CP agreed to share power in name only. It is hardly surprising that the tri-partite accords were resoundingly rejected by Solidarity as a whole for its ranks demanded the substance of power at both the national and local level, especially through election. In turn, the CP itself hardly pressed the issue once it had recovered from the initial ef-

fect of the workers' attacks and had worked out alternative tactics.

## A Slow March Through the Institutions: Taking Power From Below, But Not Above

Within the Solidarity leadership, perhaps the most powerful alternative strategy to that of Walesa came from the forces originating in the old KOR, Committee for Social Self Defense, led by Jacek Kuron, Karel Modzelewski, and Adam Michnik. They began from the same place as Walesa. They accepted as axiomatic—as a given not subject to question—the defining dilemma of the Polish revolution: that the workers and Solidarity had power, but they could not take it, because of the risks of Soviet intervention. This meant the revolution had to accept certain limits, or risk being crushed.

Nevertheless, in contrast with Walesa, the old KOR leaders rejected any close collaboration with the regime, and above all, they denied that there could be an accommodation with the bureaucracy at the top. Instead, they aimed for a long period of dual power, which they thought the Soviet Union could accept as long as Solidarity did not *directly* challenge the Polish CP's political hegemony or the USSR's international interests.

They proposed that Solidarity follow a strategy of enveloping the regime, by taking *de facto* power in the economy and other social institutions, *but not the state*. They hoped to slowly strangle to death the bureaucracy by cutting it off from its roots in society. The point of departure of this group was succinctly stated by Kuron:

To my mind, the most important issue is whether or not we should limit ourselves. . . . My general position is that if we do anything that the leaders of the USSR read as a direct threat, they will invade. I have no doubts about this. Therefore, I believe that the revolution should consciously limit itself, so as to avoid this danger.

Thus, like Walesa, this group ruled out, in advance, any explicit attempt to take state power or to form a political party (for the latter would have been interpreted as existing for the purpose of taking power). Like Walesa, this group found itself placing an overwhelming emphasis on tactics: how to take a step forward without actually appearing to do so; how to avoid bringing down repression.

What then was the positive program of these former leaders of KOR? It was above all, to bring about the properly-paced introduction of workers self-management throughout the economy. In addition, Kuron and his associates were driven to support plans for bringing in the market. Through the operation of the market, they hoped further to unhinge the economy from the control of the bureaucracy. It was, indeed, this program of self-management plus the market which formed the core of Solidarity's program, as it was adopted at its autumn convention. It therefore requires the closest examination.

Now the fact that Solidarity appears to have endorsed the use of the market has provided a justification for some leftists in the West to disavow Solidarity. If Solidarity seeks to introduce the market, they say, that Solidarity must be "taking the capitalist road". Yet, in no way does



the premise justify this conclusion. Such reasoning misconstrues the real significance and fundamental source of the move to the market in Eastern Europe. And it ignores the strategic, non-economic role of the market in Solidarity's over-all political strategy. Let us look at these points more closely.

In the first place, it is elements within the ruling bureaucracy, not the working class, which are the primary advocates of the use of the market throughout Eastern Europe, including Poland. Put very briefly, the need to bring in the market arises from the bureaucracy's enormous difficulties in developing the economy on the basis of a centralized plan. Due to the alienation of the working class from the bureaucracy, the central planners cannot get the constant feedback they need to make planning work—to effectively allocate the productive assets of the economy. The central planners also find it very difficult to induce either workers or managers to economize in the use of the means of production (labor power, raw materials, tools), or to bring in new labor saving equipment. This is because there is little incentive for the worker or manager to become more efficient—to achieve the same or greater output with fewer inputs. For they cannot appropriate the benefits of increased production. (They regard the creation of a surplus "for social use" as being in the bureaucracy's interest, not their own.) There is even reason for the managers to engage in the counterproductive practice of hoarding resources in order to ensure making their quotas.

Because of these difficulties, the bureaucracies of Eastern Europe have shown themselves able to accomplish little more than the initial phase of economic development by way of "primitive accumulation".—i.e., transferring the working population from agriculture to heavy industry. To take the further steps required to develop a more sophisticated economy, these bureaucracies have found themselves driven, to a greater or lesser extent, to give over control of production to the individual firms (who would now get the incentive of keeping much of the profits). Once this happens, a market economy begins to emerge. In the name of efficiency, the market is used to allocate resources for the economy as a whole. Competition among the factories and among the workers is supposed to enforce economizing and innovating. To carry out this policy however creates problems for the bureaucracy. It means running the risks of inflation and unemployment. And perhaps even more important for the leadership, it means relaxing their grip on production and thereby undermining their ruling position. Indeed, to the degree that the individual factories are allowed to integrate themselves into the world market, it tends to open up the potential of capitalist restoration.

Nevertheless, the use of the market has already gone rather far in Hungary and Rumania. And in Poland, the bureaucracy has already endorsed plans for the introduction of the market. (Indeed, after the coup, they went so far as to lease state-owned agricultural plants to private entrepreneurs.) Moreover, it is the CP which led the way in integrating the Polish economy into the world market in the 1970s (with disastrous results). And it was, of course, the current Polish government which, with Russian approval, recently proposed to bring Poland into the International Monetary Fund, joining Hungary and Rumania.

On the other hand, Solidarity, although endorsing the use of the market, also made it clear that it proposed to operate the economy by central, democratically-elected bodies, which would relate to an overall plan. Solidarity also pointed to many of the dangers of the market, and declared that the market may be used only to the extent that, the abuses to which the market organically tends to give rise can be controlled. Indeed, were Solidarity, as the instrument of the working class, actually to take power and gain control of the economy as a whole, there is every reason to believe that its basic tendency would be to draw back from the market. For a government of the working class, could see concretely how its commitment to workers self-management, to the prevention of unemployment, to increasing equality, etc. are *contradicted* by the market. This appears even more probable when one considers that Solidarity's reasons for support of the market were far more political and strategic than economic and theoretical.

Solidarity adopted the market option for two reasons. First, there was the widespread hostility to the only experience people had had with centralized planning—that organized in Poland by the bureaucracy. But above all, the proposal for the market was one inevitable aspect of the broader perspective of Kuron and the old KOR leaders for taking over the economy "from below", *without challenging the state*. If, as Kuron and his colleagues proposed, one could not take over the Polish state, but only the economy, then it would obviously be more difficult to implement a national plan. A strategy of a partial taking of power—of the economy, but not the state—permits only a partial control of the economy, and therefore appears to require at least a de-emphasis on planning. For the planning would seem, at least to a great degree, to be the province of the bureaucratic state authorities. Therefore, Solidarity's strategy of by-passing, then enveloping the state appeared to require greater reliance on workers control at the level of the enterprise, less state control of the economy as a whole, therefore somewhat more use of the market.

Nevertheless, even without the benefit of hindsight, one is legitimately puzzled as to how it was that Solidarity's leaders could have remained satisfied with such a strategy, in view of their own explicit analyses of the dynamics of the situation. *How, in particular, could they have hoped to "detach", even for a moment, the operation of the economy from the control of the state in a society like Poland, without directly challenging the state authorities*. For, it was certainly clear to them that in the bureaucratically-ruled economies, such as Poland, the control over the organization of the production and allocation of the surplus constituted the substance of the bureaucracy's power.

One cannot, therefore, help but wonder on what basis so much of the Solidarity leadership could have hoped (as they apparently did) that the state apparatus would somehow accept their taking over the society *indirectly* and in a *piecemeal fashion*, when they knew quite well that neither the Polish bureaucracy nor the Soviet Union would accept the *direct* taking of power by the working class. Did not the introduction of a truly self-managed economy imply the end of the rule by the bureaucracy, and wasn't this evident to everyone?

Not all among the KOR tendency, refused to face this difficulty head on. Bronslaw Geremek, a Solidarity ex-







tories was a pre-requisite for the implementation of a coherent economic policy which could deal with the crisis. Finally, at least several of these people drew the strategic conclusion that because state power had to be seized, it was necessary to construct a political party. Milewski, for example, founded the Polish Labor Party (in fact, some thirty five largely regional parties were formed).

All these figures argued, in one way or another, that it was necessary to elect a new government of the working class to a restructured Parliament, or to a newly-founded lower house of the Sejm, or to some type of worker assemblies (or to some combination of these). However, to our limited knowledge, these radical elements never made clear how power actually was to be transferred to such governing bodies from the bureaucracy. That is, they never developed a strategy for taking power.

Perhaps these radical elements (or others) actually did go further than we know in confronting the question of taking over the state. Nevertheless, what seems clear is that no very broad section of the working class, or of the working class leadership, had thought through plans to deal with the ultimate questions of power in Polish society—above all, what to do about the brute fact of the state's monopoly of force. The rank and file of Solidarity was gradually eroding the bureaucracy's domination. Yet, no one appears to have asked what was to be done should a confrontation become unavoidable as a result... no one, that is, except the CP bureaucracy itself.

## The Bureaucracy's Counterrevolution

The Polish bureaucracy understood from the start, and perhaps better than anyone else, the predicament of Solidarity. It, therefore, pursued at all times a policy designed to wait out the working class, wear down its will to fight. Nevertheless, even while implementing its fundamental policy of harassing, splitting and tiring the movement in order to coopt it, the bureaucracy prepared for forceful confrontation. In essence, it had two tactics for only one goal: to crush the movement, while giving up no essential element of its power. Thus, those who thought the CP merely made certain "mistakes" in failing to work out a compromise with Solidarity for the reform of the system close their eyes to the Party's near-absolute inflexibility on fundamentals, and its consistent pattern of resistance to change at all points in the struggle.

The attitude of the CP was very well summed up in the closing scene of Wajda's film about Gdansk, "Man of Iron". The bureaucrat tells it all. 'Don't worry. The (Gdansk) accords are just a scrap of paper, signed under duress. At the appropriate time we'll tear it up.'

All through the period, the CP did its best to force the working class to re-win their demands time and again. There was not an ounce of give. After Gdansk accords, the bureaucracy not only tried to go back on their wage concessions, but as noted, even to rescind the right to independent trade unions. By January 1981, the bureaucracy was going back on the five day work week. Despite the enormous mass strike of March 1981, and the subsequent agreement to recognize the farmers' organization, the government never registered Rural Solidarity. Nor was Solidarity ever granted the access to the media it was

promised by the government in the Gdansk accords. Finally, throughout the period, the government was attempting to withdraw perhaps the most pivotal right of all, the right to strike. Indeed, the government ultimately used this issue as a springboard for its coup.

While making the workers expend every ounce of available energy merely to retain what they already had gained, the government, so far as possible, pursued a policy of constant harassment. Arrests of leading Solidarity officers or leading local militants were made at almost every moment of intensified struggle. The massive application of force against the movement which occurred at the time of the Solidarity sit-in at Bydgoszcz was probably unprecedented in degree (before the coup), but not in kind. Of course, sometimes force was applied indirectly, as when it was announced that KOR was being investigated for possible illegalities, or when Solidarity headquarters in Warsaw and elsewhere were searched.

Meanwhile, every trick in the book, however low, was brought out to try to discredit Solidarity. In the Spring 1981, a group of leading Party hardliners, the so-called "Grunwald Group", began putting out their own mass newspaper (with Party resources). An integral aspect of their assault on Solidarity was the use of anti-semitism. They portrayed the movement as led by Jews, as part of a Jewish conspiracy to give over power in Poland to the Jews.

Of course, even while maintaining such heavy pressure on the working class, the government was also pursuing, with more or less vigor, a policy designed to soften up the movement by appearing to offer concessions. Nevertheless, as noted, even when the Party appeared most conciliatory—as in its offer in September 1981 of the tri-partite agreement for power sharing in a "National Government of Salvation"—it promised nothing substantial, so far as the real instruments of power were concerned. The purpose of its offers of compromise was, at every point, to try to split and demoralize the movement—in particular, to detach Lech Walesa from the more radical elements in Solidarity and use his prestige to win over the masses to the side of the state—a policy which never succeeded.<sup>1</sup>

No doubt (in a manner analogous to Solidarity), the bureaucracy hoped to manage a slow, non-confrontational transition back to a reconsolidated old regime, through a bit-by-bit erosion of the workers' strength. But, through the entire period, the bureaucracy never lost sight of one overriding fact: that its cooptive tactics might fail, and that it would then be obliged to fall back on the direct use of force.

The fact is that, over the course of the struggle, the CP as an institution was almost completely discredited by its widely-acknowledged corruption, as well as for its political recalcitrance. Nevertheless, in Poland, as well as the other Eastern Bloc countries, the Party plays a critical function for the bureaucracy as a transmission belt—mobilizing the masses behind the state, and carrying feedback from the masses to the bureaucracy. As it became obvious that the Party could less and less successfully bind the masses to the state, it must have become more obvious that a resort to force was a real likelihood.

From the early Spring of 1981, if not before, Solidarity got full reports of detailed government preparations to



## Against the Current

provoke an "incident" and use this as an excuse to roundup Solidarity's chief leaders, as well as masses of key activists. (Although Solidarity failed to heed these warnings, it is, unfortunately, all too clear that a version of this plan was, indeed, put into effect). From the time of the CP Congress in the summer, greater and greater authority was being placed directly in the hands of the army, in preparation for a coup de main. Not only did General Jaruzelski take over as premier; in addition, leading soldiers were appointed to key positions in the government. Military men took over as ministers of transportation, mines, education, science, the University, and especially, the interior. So, while the spectacular, if ultimately inconclusive proceedings of the Party Congress distracted the entire nation, the military quickly positioned itself to act in the event that the Party could no longer function by normal political means.

### Provocation by Solidarity?

In the foregoing context, it is an utter misreading of the evidence to see the army's recent coup as a response to a provocation by Solidarity, in particular Solidarity's last-minute decision to call for a referendum on the acceptability of Jaruzelski. For this latter desperate action occurred only *after* the government had made clear its plans to move by force against the movement. Indeed, the coup was merely the final expression of the government's *consistent*, and increasingly fierce, resistance to change of any sort.

Whereas throughout 1981 the leadership of Solidarity was not leading but constantly *reacting* to the left pressure of the mass movement, so by December, Walesa and Kuron were reacting to the truly provocative pressure from the bureaucracy for complete capitulation.

The progression of events from the point of Solidarity's epoch-making Congress, reveals the government's intent. First, General Jaruzelski, already premier, was appointed head of the CP. Shortly thereafter, troops were dispersed throughout the provinces, to be in a position to maintain order. Next, the government announced its determination to ban strikes. But this time, the government made it clear that it was serious, by shrugging off all of Solidarity's attempt to avoid a confrontation and to reduce tensions. This was the definitive sign that the bureaucracy was preparing a confrontation, for it was crystal clear—as Solidarity stated again and again—that there was no way the movement could give up the right to strike: that would have amounted to disarming itself, discrediting and ultimately destroying itself. Meanwhile, the government only further emphasized its intentions by refusing to continue the talks on the tripartite power-sharing plan, to which it had only a short time previously given so much weight. Finally, starting in mid-November, the government began a series of raids and arrests of Solidarity leaders, including Jacek Kuron.

The final brutal coup by the army should put an end to lingering illusions that the Polish regime, or any of the other so-called socialist societies, can be transformed through piecemeal, peaceful processes of reform. The bureaucracies of these societies aim to develop production, but only in a manner which can insure their own reproduction as rulers. If they are unable to maintain their domination through some form of "consent" of the

working class (however grudgingly granted), they will resort to direct coercion. This is the lesson learned once again in Poland.

Thus, in an important recent interview following the coup, Zbigniew Bujak, leader of Warsaw Solidarity, bitterly denounced those "politicians" (and we might add leftists) in the West who have criticized Solidarity for its seemingly "provocative" stand and failure to come to terms with the regime so as to avoid the repression. Answering the question, should Solidarity have done anything differently to avoid a confrontation, Bujak declared:

My answer, will be brutal, I know that many Western politicians believe that if we had been wiser we could have avoided this tragedy. But I also know that what they call wisdom for us meant collaboration with the state and party authorities—a collaboration that would have been directed against the workers, the intellectuals, the men of culture and the arts. We would have become another annex of the totalitarian system, creating only an impression of democracy.

### Out of the Impasse?

The question remains, why the apparent passivity and paralysis of Solidarity's leadership to within days of the coup itself, despite the tightening political vise—the pressure of the working class from below and the looming pressure of the state from above?

It is true that *at the very last minute* Solidarity does appear to have realized that the moment of decision had arrived and that the strategies of the past were exhausted, if not illusory. In the final days of their meeting at Gdansk, just before the coup, Solidarity leaders called for a national referendum on the acceptability of Jaruzelski's government and on whether there should be democratic elections to a new government. Since the results of this referendum would have been a foregone conclusion, this proposal was nominally Solidarity's bid for power.

Nevertheless, it was a long way from this ineffective bid for power, to actually *organizing* for a seizure of power. Heroic as it was, Solidarity's leadership was unprepared for the showdown, politically and organizationally. They were forced to *back into* a revolutionary posture. As a result, the confrontation came not in the way or at a time which was optimal for the success of the revolution, but on the initiative and the ground of the enemy.

Kuron explicitly recognized the leadership's paralysis in a speech at the October meeting of Solidarity's leadership in Radom. "Solidarity's leaders have already lost control of their members. All strikes and protest actions relating to the crisis-like food situation originate from the grass roots, and there is nothing that Solidarity's leaders can do but take note of them."

The tone of resignation of the foregoing statement, even as the working class was stepping up its attacks, can only have reflected, once again, the feeling that not to "limit the revolution" was to invite Soviet intervention. Now it is not difficult to comprehend the depressing effect of this danger upon any conscious movement towards the seizure of power in Poland, as well as the immense tactical difficulties it posed. One can understand, moreover, the reluctance to risk the enormous suffering to society which such an invasion would very likely have brought.



Nevertheless, such an understanding cannot be allowed to induce paralysis. Because if one assumes that this problem cannot be confronted successfully, one gives up, in advance, any hope for social transformation in Eastern Europe, and elsewhere.

Taking power in Poland was necessary because, as we have emphasized, and as recent events have made all too evident, the Polish revolution simply could not proceed by half measures—not in '56, '70 or '81. As Zbigniew Bu-jak, head of Warsaw Solidarity, and now leader of Solidarity underground, concluded in the aftermath of the coup, there was simply no middle way, despite widespread illusions to the contrary:

Many people compared the construction of Solidarity to a revolution. But this revolution precluded the use of force and kept the arrangements determining the Polish *raison d'état*—alliances [within the Soviet Union], economic cooperation [with the Soviet Union], and the leading role of the Polish United Workers Party [CP].

It was supposed to allow the party and the government authorities to reform the system of rule in the country and find a new formula for the leading role of the party, taking into account the social changes that were occurring. *It is known now, however, that nobody was thinking about such changes and reforms and that our hopes—that we would find even a token of good will on the other side—were illusory.*

There were, in the last analysis, only two choices—which in the end reduced to one. Solidarity could allow the further deterioration of conditions and, sooner or later, the restoration of the bureaucracy's stranglehold, either by cooptation or repression. Or, it could, sooner or later, seize state power, risking direct Soviet intervention.

The latter strategy was not just necessary, but contained the possibility of success. On the one hand, Russian intervention, direct if necessary, seemed certain. For the example of a real workers state on the Russian Border would have exploded, once and for all the myth that socialism of any sort exists inside the USSR. This could only have had far-reaching and vastly de-stabilizing consequences, not only inside, but beyond the Eastern bloc. Thus any responsible attempt at state power on the part of Solidarity would have had to be premised on the expectation of a soviet invasion.

On the other hand, this does not mean that such intervention was bound to take place or bound to succeed. After all, outside armed intervention by reactionary forces has accompanied almost every great revolution from the French in 1789, through the Russian of 1917, to the Chinese of the 1930s and '40s, right down to the Vietnamese Revolution of today (and most probably, the Central American Revolution of tomorrow.)

Further, in view of the depth and breadth of popular support for the 10,000,000 member Solidarity, there was a real potential for winning over the Polish army. Certainly, many of the conscripts sympathized with the movement. But this sympathy had to be organized in order to be effective. Winning over the soldiers is not unprecedented under revolutionary conditions. It was brilliantly accomplished in Portugal in 1974-75, not to mention Russia in 1917. Had the Polish soldiers supported Solidarity, it is even conceivable that a Russian invasion might have been discouraged. Certainly the

chances of success of such an invasion would have been reduced. On the other hand, failure to organize the army permitted the unimpeded use of Polish elite troops as a surrogate for the Russian military in the recent coup. No doubt, organizing the troops would have been "provocative". Yet in this situation, every advance in workers power is seen as a provocation, from the fight for independent trade unions to the call for workers self-management. It should be recalled that Salvador Allende, to the end of avoiding provocation, allowed his own rank and file supporters in the Chilean army to be crushed.

Furthermore, Solidarity was certainly well-enough organized to carry out possible resistance in the plants and throughout the society for a very long time. In this way, they could have exacted an enormous price from any occupying Russian force.

In addition it must be noted that an invasion would have been very costly to the Russians. They were already bogged down in Afghanistan, taking heavy political and economic losses. The price of an intervention in populous, industrial Poland would have been immeasurably higher.

Finally, one certainly could not rule out in advance the possibility of parallel and ultimately linked, working class risings elsewhere in Eastern Europe if Solidarity had made efforts in this direction. (One could not rule out such responses any more than one could rule out the Polish upsurge itself in advance.) This possibility would be enhanced, if a large part of the Russian army had been pinned down in Poland.

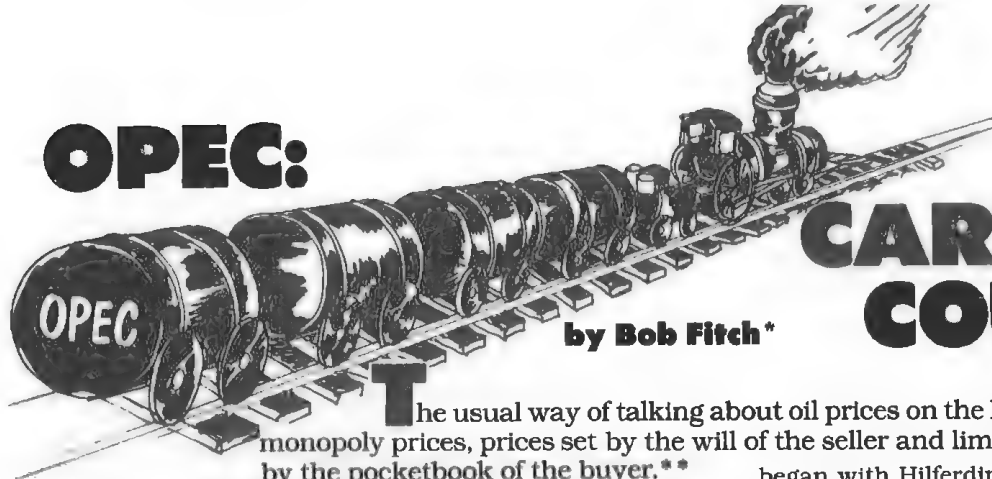
It is of course pointless to speculate upon the outcome of the adoption of a revolutionary strategy in Poland. We have maintained that the extraordinary difficulties and complexities of the situation could only be successfully addressed (though without guarantees) if Solidarity made the takeover of the state the accepted and understood goal of the movement. There was, as we have noted earlier, a current in Poland which included prominent leaders of Solidarity (Gwiazda, Rulewski, Malewski, and not a few others) who *did* understand the limitations of a "limited revolution", and saw the need to take political power. But those who saw the need for a strategy of taking power, and the parallel need for a revolutionary political instrument *to fight for that strategy within the movement*, were never able to cohere or achieve unity.\* Yet such a political instrument was necessary if Solidarity was to be won to and prepared for a successful, conclusive confrontation with the authorities. And only if the masses of people were clear about this necessity could Solidarity actually have developed, and carried out the appropriate tactics, both offensive and defensive. On such a basis Solidarity could even have carried through an orderly retreat, if necessary, with the minimum of demoralization—in order to resume the attack later, under more favorable conditions.

The defeat of the Polish workers movement is a grave setback for every socialist and worker. But we can not allow it to demoralize us. The eruptions of the Polish working class in '56, '70, '80, give us the right to believe that the Polish revolution will rise again, with new intensity and new maturity.

\*For a detailed consideration of the problem of the revolutionary party, and its role in Poland, see ATC, Winter 1981



# OPEC:



by Bob Fitch\*

# THE BIG CARTEL THAT COULDN'T..

**T**he usual way of talking about oil prices on the Left is to assume that they are monopoly prices, prices set by the will of the seller and limited only by the pocketbook of the buyer.\*\*

It is quite understandable that neo-liberals and social democrats would seek to explain oil prices in terms of an all powerful monopoly or cartel: one which permanently suspends the law of value and the law of the average rate of profit.<sup>2</sup> Because the prevalence of "monopoly profits" is indispensable to social democratic theory. Ever since the turn of the century, when social democracy became a serious political tendency there has been a requirement for a theory which justifies the state regulation of capitalism and explains how it is possible. For under a system in which markets tend towards a competitive equilibrium there can be no substantial welfare state. Without large and continuous surplus profits there can be no justification for a policy of state regulation, no comprehensive programs of fundamental reforms on which social democracy's hopes rest, no long-term transfer of wealth between classes, no serious "incomes" policy, no state economic planning, etc. And without monopoly prices there can be no surplus profits. Monopoly prices must generate surplus profits so large that the state can appropriate a share of them without causing a disturbance in the pattern of normal capital accumulation. Suppose, to illustrate the principle, the bond rate is 10% and the average rate of profit is twenty percent. If the state taxes corporate profits at 50%, then corporate profits are brought down to 10% and it no longer pays the corporations to invest in their enterprises. They might as well invest in government bonds, liquidate their capital, or transfer it overseas. But suppose there are surplus profits and the rate of profit is thirty percent. Then the state can still levy its 50% tax and the corporations will be left with 15%—a substantial amount above the bond rate and enough to maintain normal accumulation.

The social democratic analysis of monopoly prices and surplus profits which has evolved over the past century,

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\*\*The idea that there is any law that governs oil prices, or any law that governs the distribution of surplus value from oil revenue between the different strata of the capitalist class—this idea of lawfulness has been treated very lightly by the Left.<sup>1</sup> Much of the Left tends to associate the idea of lawfulness with the laws of supply and demand invoked by conservatives to justify *laissez faire*. Until recently, many leftists have failed to distinguish between Marxian laws, which grow out of historically determined social relations of production and the so-called universal laws of supply and demand that operate within the sphere of circulation and which are said to be based on scarcity and tastes—that is, on factors that are timeless, factors which preceded capitalism and which would exist in socialism too. In other words, there has been a failure to discriminate between two sets of laws: those that explain the deepest tendencies of the system in terms of its exploitative production relations, laws which reveal the historical character of capitalism, and a wholly different set of laws that disguise exploitation and tend to legitimate the existing relations of production and immortalize them.

began with Hilferding<sup>3</sup> in Germany, and Sraffa<sup>4</sup> in the U.K. It was refined and developed by Joan Robinson<sup>5</sup> and Michael Kalecki<sup>6</sup> in the 1930's at Cambridge and popularized more recently by writers like Galbraith.<sup>7</sup> It constitutes the soundest and most appropriate economic foundation for a politics of state regulation of capitalism. Vote for the neo-liberal and social democratic parties and they will use the state to appropriate some of the surplus generated by the monopolies and channel some of it your way. Their analysis, program and bait nestle nicely together.

But why does the Left replicate this analysis?<sup>8</sup> And the analysis is indistinguishable. Like various Democratic Party senators such as Ted Kennedy, just like consumer advocate Ralph Nader and activists Tom Hayden and Jane Fonda, the Left insists that the price of oil is a consequence of a rip-off by the international oil cartel which earns incredible super-profits by creating artificial oil crises. By keeping supplies scarce, the cartel is able to drive up the price of oil. Sometimes this analysis will include OPEC. If it does, then the "high" price of oil is said by many on the left to be justified by past imperialist exploitation and the needs of Third World countries for economic development and industrialization. But this theory of oil prices corresponds to the general theory of prices held by the Democratic Party, the theory of administered prices. Big business is increasingly concentrated; concentration leads to monopoly; monopoly corporations charge monopoly prices. The most famous Democratic Party economist today is Galbraith; fifty years ago it was Gardiner Means.<sup>9</sup> Same party, same price theory.

It's true that the Left's prescription is different. Instead of regulate and tax, the Left says revolt and overthrow. But does this conclusion really flow from the analysis? If prices can be regulated, if income can be transferred, if the corporations can be made to behave in a better, more socially responsive way, why not elect someone with enough guts and charisma to do the job? Why bother to abolish classes, or create new social relations of production, above all, why go through a bloody revolution to do what price theory indicates that the Democrats can do peacefully through parliamentary institutions, congressional committees and the two party system?

## Critique

The notion that the price of oil (like prices in general) must be understood as the consequence of an all-powerful cartel exercising overwhelming downward pressure over supply and upward pressure on price is not only politically counter-productive, it is also demonstrably rather implausible. As late as December 1979, the Secretary of the Department of Energy (now defunct) declared that "the subject of supply fragility will be timely tomorrow and for the next two decades." (Business Week, 24 December 1979) But only two years later, in the



avored phrase of pundits, the world is "awash" with oil. An estimated two to three million barrels a day is in excess of a total world consumption of approximately sixty mbd. Storage of oil has replaced scarcity of oil as the hot topic in energy circles.

For a period of about five years OPEC came to be widely regarded as one of the world's dominant economic forces. Wall Street bankers genuflected to its pronouncements. U.S. President Carter confessed that the U.S. economy was helpless before OPEC price onslaughts. Terrorists paid its delegates the homage of kidnapping them *en masse* at a Vienna meeting. All this rapt attention assumed that *someone*, not *something* determines oil prices.

But if OPEC *could* control prices, isn't it reasonable to suppose that the organization would have raised prices, or at least kept them level over the past two years? Instead, what we have seen is a fall in OPEC's per barrel price from about \$36.00 in 1980 to about \$32.50 in 1982. Alongside this nominal fall of nearly 10% must be added an inflation weighted fall of another approximately 15%—a total 25% relative decline. Moreover, in December, 1981 OPEC signed agreements to keep prices at the \$32.50 level throughout 1982 during which time inflation will erode the real price of oil another approximately 8%-12%. While it would be premature to begin taking up a collection for the Saudi royal family, it certainly is an odd way for a cartel to express its power—by cutting its price about one third over a three year period. But perhaps OPEC has its reasons for cutting oil prices? Sheik Yamani, the Saudi oil spokesperson, has always insisted that his kingdom is free to set prices at any level desired. But Saudi Arabia is not predatory. Yamani insists that prices are set chiefly according to such desiderata as the integrity of the world financial system, U.S. economic development, etc.<sup>10</sup> Anyone familiar with cartel behavior will observe that Saudi price and output decisions correspond in near textbook fashion to how a cartel price leader generally behaves: the member with the lowest production costs and the largest reserves will frequently seek to charge a lower price than less favored members in order to maximize its revenue within the cartel and forestall new production outside the cartel that would be stimulated by a higher price.

But increasingly, OPEC's claim to cartel status seems as spurious as Sheik Yamani's claim to be guided in price actions chiefly by the interests of Western civilization. A producers' cartel, such as the one OPEC purports to be, sets mutually agreeable prices and pro-rates production among its members in order to achieve an output that will maintain the desired price. OPEC behaves rather differently. What other cartel has suffered the kidnapping of the oil minister of one of its members by the security forces of another as in the case of recent Iranian actions against Iraq. More substantially, throughout most of 1981 OPEC not only failed to limit production, or reach any agreement on production quotas, it was unable to agree on a single price for its basic commodity—Arabian light "market crude". High cost, low reserve OPEC members like Venezuela (a "hawk" in newspaper parlance) charged \$36.00 a barrel, while low cost, large reserve Saudi Arabia (the "dove") charged \$32.00. In order to force the "hawks" to lower their price, Saudi Arabia waged a kind of economic war against its partners, increasing its output from 8 to over 10 million barrels a day. Finally, the agreement was reached on Saudi terms. And

should the present world-wide recession continue or intensify, further downward pressure will be exerted on OPEC's agreement. Should this occur, doubtless another meeting of OPEC foreign ministers will be called and a new, lower price will be established. But despite appearances such an action won't establish OPEC's power to set prices, any more than the weatherman's ability to read a thermometer establishes his power to make the weather. (This analogy must not be taken literally of course. Evidently, there have been periods when OPEC *was* able to exact a monopoly price in the Marxian sense i.e., one relatively independent of the value or price of production of oil.)

How then is the price of oil determined? What is the underlying value or price of production of oil? Throughout the late 1970's, it was taken for granted by the overwhelming majority of economists that the price of oil could only go up, independent of any objective factors. Whatever OPEC wanted, OPEC got. It was a question of how tightly they wanted to squeeze their customers, an estimate based on how much juice they thought was left in the old rind. In the late 1960's and early 1970's, the opposite dogma was often expressed by conservatives—the OPEC price was clearly an aberration. Soon the ineluctable forces of supply and demand would restore prices back to their equilibrium levels of the mid 1960's and gas prices would recede to 25 cents a gallon. In 1969 M.A. Adelman, the leading academic authority on oil prices concluded his testimony before the Senate Anti-Trust Subcommittee by predicting "Thus, the prospect is: continued decline of prices but at a very slow and gradual rate". In a massive study for Resources for the Future, published in 1972, Adelman continued to dispute "the conventional wisdom . . . that the exporting countries, having discovered the strength of their bargaining position when acting in concert, will be able to exact ever higher prices despite the wide and now even wider margin between prices and the real costs of production."<sup>12</sup> The price soon quadrupled. Kicking poor Adelman, chortling in *post hoc* fashion over how absurd his analysis of the oil market turned out, grew into a kind of international sport among the fraternity of energy economists. Now, however, it is *their* analyses that appear superannuated.<sup>13</sup>

But an understanding of oil prices cannot simply revert back to a recitation of the divine harmonies of the market place. What needs to be understood is why the price of oil is \$32.50 and not \$325.00 or \$3.25. In other words, why the price of oil tends, more or less, over time, to correspond to its value. What monopoly theorists and conventional neo-classical theorists have in common is that both ignore the crucial category of value. This means that we must turn for illumination back to Marx and the tradition of classical political economy.

## Price of Primary vs Manufactured Commodities

In explaining how Marx's general theory of price formation and revenue distribution could be applied to present day oil prices, two chief difficulties present themselves. The first is the necessity to distinguish between the theory of price formation for *manufactured* commodities and the theory of price formation for *primary* commodities (oil, copper, cotton, wheat). This distinction is absolutely necessary for the coherence of Marxian

## Against the Current

political economy and theory of class struggle. Nevertheless it tends to be ignored in modern Marxist literature. To some writers—even sympathetic writers—the pains that Marx took in developing the theory of rent in Capital III and in the Theories of Surplus Value symphonise at best a kind of Germanic thoroughness, if not an altogether unhealthy obsession with economic trivia. Like Beethoven, who could never finish his symphonies and got bogged down in interminable finales, Marx, it would appear, avoided finishing *Capital* by fretting on endlessly about the vicissitudes of grain prices.<sup>14</sup>

But such explanations overlook a significant fact. The sphere of primary commodity production regularly and systematically gives rise to surplus profits *within* that sphere. The production of manufactured commodities can also generate surplus profits, but the surplus profits within these spheres—autos, appliances, clothes, etc.—are confined within much narrower limits. (Marx's theory of the law of the average rate of profit states only that profit rates *between* spheres of production tend towards equalization; he does not believe that such a tendency exists *within* a sphere.<sup>15</sup>) The fact of these very large surplus profits in primary commodity production is not without practical significance. It is, even today, the necessary, if not the sufficient basis for the change in financial relations that has taken place between the advanced industrialized countries of the west and the Persian Gulf oil producers.

Marx's aim was first to try to analyze the material conditions and the social relations of production that gave rise to these differences in the magnitude of surplus profits generated within the two spheres. Second, he tried to show how the much larger surplus in primary commodities is lawfully divided between the two main strata of the capitalist class. This problem cannot be easily dismissed either. Typically, the sphere of manufactured commodities gives rise to a two class system—workers and industrial capitalists, whereas the sphere of primary production, typically gives rise to a three class system—workers, capitalists and landlords.<sup>16</sup> Specifically, the problem Marx has to solve is the following: assuming (a) the normal operation of market forces, i.e., no blockage to entry of capital into an industry; (b) the operation of the law of value; and (c) the law of the average rate of profit, how is it possible for there to be a landlord class which forces the operating capitalist class to share its revenue—and in some cases, hand over the great bulk of its revenue? How can there still be “enough” for the operating capitalists under these circumstances? Why isn't the profit depressed below the average?

There is an easy way to solve the problem. This is to assume the theory of administered prices or its radical counterpart, the theory of monopoly capitalism. If the operating capitalists can push up the price by withholding supplies, if blockage to entry can be more or less permanently enforced, then everyone can get a resoundingly large share. But then there is no law of value either. Either prices are proportionate to their values or they are independent of them. But Marx was, to put it mildly, not satisfied with this solution—either when propounded by bourgeois economists like De Stütt Tracy or by radical economists like Duhring and Proudhon. He regarded such solutions as pitiable evasions, tautologies, certificates of incompetence. The minute these assumptions were embraced, he wrote, economics ceased to be a science.<sup>17</sup>

The second difficulty in applying Marx's theory of price formation for primary commodities to oil prices consists in distinguishing between levels of analysis. At the most general and most abstract level of determination, it is true that oil prices are set by the amount of socially necessary labor time required by the producer operating under the least favorable circumstances. Saudi oil costs 25 cents a barrel to produce; oil in the Montana overthrust upwards of \$25.00 a barrel. It is the latter which sets the price, not the former. But however important it is to recognize the primacy of this level of determination, i.e., to recognize the primacy of value, it is not enough—if the aim is to understand the actual historical behavior of oil prices. To explain this pattern more superficial levels of analysis have to be brought in. First of all, we have to take into account the effect of cycles on primary commodities. These tend to force prices above and below their socially necessary labor times. (The classic discussion of cyclical explosion of raw material prices connected with a world wide boycott can be found in Marx's discussion of cotton prices.<sup>18</sup> The parallel with the price explosion of 1973-1975 and the Arab boycott is eerie.) Finally, despite what many economists suppose—Marx was well aware of monopolies and their power. He does take into account the fact that barriers to entry, cartels, etc., can within limits condition price formation. He insisted however, that as capitalism developed these barriers would become less important rather than more.<sup>19</sup>

So, if the question were, “Why did the price of oil quadruple between 1972 and 1973?”, we would start out at this most abstract level—socially necessary labor time—and investigate the costs of the least favorably situated producer; how with the increase in demand caused by the boom there was a recourse to increasingly more poorly situated and more expensive drilling sites. Next we would investigate how the inelasticity of oil supplies and the inelasticities of oil demand caused an explosion in price<sup>20</sup>—very similar to that which took place in other raw materials, e.g., sugar, tin, soybeans. Finally, at the lowest level of abstraction we would have to bring in the State—U.S. import quotas—how they had artificially depressed prices in the Middle East<sup>21</sup>—how price cutting led to the formation of OPEC,<sup>22</sup> the role of OPEC, the actions of the “seven sister” oil companies, the independents, the role of the Soviet Union, etc. We can spell out the limits of the effects of the causes we're talking about. With a knowledge of the price of production of the given oil producing countries and a knowledge of world demand (which admittedly fluctuates under capitalism in an arbitrary and irrational way) it ought to be possible to predict the price of oil within rather narrow limits.

With these preliminaries and qualifications, let me start to present the theory which does just that.

## VALUE AND THE PRICE OF OIL

Let me start with a quote from Ricardo:

The exchangeable value of all commodities whether they be manufactured or the produce of the mines or the produce of the land is always regulated *not* by the *less* quantity of labor which will suffice for their production under circumstances highly favorable and exclusively enjoyed by those who have peculiar facilities of production, but by the *greater* quantity of labour necessarily bestowed on their production by those who have no such facilities.<sup>23</sup>



What Ricardo is getting at is that the price is regulated by the least favored producer. The richest soil doesn't regulate the price, the poorest soil does. Does this mean that no matter how poor the soil is it sets the price? No. It's a question of the external margin: those producers whose costs are such that the price they receive just enables them to recover their costs plus an average profit.

Notice what's *not* being said: that supply and demand equalize to set the price. Supply and demand do count for something here. But this is a much more sophisticated theory because it predicts that price, given a certain demand, and given certain conditions of production, will clear the market. In the supply and demand theory however, the price is indeterminate.

Ricardo says the price is set by least favored producers. Adelman says—the most favored producers. According to him, "Persian Gulf development—operating cost today fixes the supply price of oil, including necessary finding cost or Maximum Economic Finding Cost (MEFC) for the whole world."<sup>24</sup> Persian Gulf producers are of course the most favorably situated. The belief that it is the most favorably situated producers that determine costs and, therefore, profits led Adelman to predict that oil prices would inevitably fall. When prices quadrupled, he argued that the price escalation was just a temporary phenomenon. When the level of 1973-5 proved not to be temporary, Adelman was forced to contradict his fundamental assumption of market competition. Now Adelman, like the radicals, explains prices in the highly competitive oil business as a consequence of the OPEC monopoly.

What about radical economics? How does it explain prices? On the basis of supply and demand just like neo-classical economics. The difference is that radicals (and liberals) argue that all prices set by giant corporations are monopoly prices pushed above their competitive equilibrium by the exercise of their power in the market. Prices are set administratively. The exercise of naked power pushes prices above their equilibrium price.

Now it's true that you can't understand the price formation of primary commodities without a monopoly theory, but the radicals have the wrong monopoly theory. They think the monopoly in question is the product of concentration of capital which enables the seller to withhold supplies in order to fetch higher prices; that the price which results from aggregate and market concentration is one determined by the will of the seller and limited only by the income of the buyer. Although such monopolies do exist, they are exceptions which form in opposition to a general tendency towards an equalization of the rate of profit.

## Rent As Class Monopoly

The operative monopoly that has to be understood in the case of the price formation of primary commodities is the monopoly of what Ricardo calls "peculiar facilities", e.g., a monopoly of soils of superior fertility, of mines with particularly rich veins of ore, of oil deposits lying relatively close to the surface in relatively large magnitude. Thus what is involved here is not a monopoly growing out of relations between supply and demand for commodities and regulated by market power, but a class monopoly. This class monopoly enables the owners of peculiar facilities, i.e., landlords, to exclude capitalists from exploiting

the resources of land except insofar as they give up some of their surplus value.

Before we can figure out how the landlords and capitalists divide the surplus value, i.e., how much is rent and how much is profit, we have to ask where the surplus value comes from. Where indeed, since we have been arguing that we are not talking about a monopoly price, a price higher than the value, higher than the socially necessary amount of labor time required for production.<sup>25</sup> Is the capitalist settling for a lower than average profit to enable the landlord to get his rent? The answer is no. The capitalist in agriculture, mining, like the capitalists in manufacturing, tend to earn the average profit. What happens however is that a surplus profit is formed because there are objective differences in costs of production of a given commodity, even though all commodities of the same kind sell for the same price, or tend to. Take oil and wheat. Regardless of where the oil is produced, or how much it costs to produce, its price is about \$35.00 a barrel. Wheat is \$3.00 a bushel no matter where it is produced or what its costs are. What we are confronted with here is the SOCIAL NATURE OF VALUE. Only socially necessary labor time counts towards the valuation of a commodity. The barrel of oil sells for the same price no matter what the difference in natural conditions, and the result is that the producer on the more favored conditions earns a surplus profit. How much? The difference between his cost of production and the cost of the least favored producer.

How is this any different from manufactured commodities? In fact, in the quote from Ricardo, he specifically stated that exchange value was determined by the costs of the least favored producer whether he was a manufacturer or a mine owner or a farmer. Why make a big deal out of surplus profits from any primary production? Why emphasize these? The answer is that differences in costs of production tend to be evened out much more in manufacturing than in agriculture or mining. There is a difference between say, Toyota and AMC in costs of production; but that difference is of a lower magnitude than that existing between U.S. agribusiness and an Indian peasant; or between Saudia Arabian oil producers and U.S. oil producers. Technological differences tended to be evened out. Natural differences cannot be evened out. Marx has an elegant argument illustrating this in Volume III of Capital using a waterfall.

Here is the argument greatly simplified. Take two capitalists producing the same commodity. Their costs are equal except for one item. One capitalist has been able to locate his factory near a waterfall so that he is able to receive free power. The other capitalist must buy coal. The general price of production for this commodity is 100. This magnitude corresponds to the costs of the coal-using capitalist. But the waterfall using capitalist has costs of only 90. Assume further that the average rate of profit is 15%. Both capitalists will sell their commodities at 115. A surplus profit will thus be generated for the waterfall using capitalist, unless he is renting the land on which the waterfall is located, in which case the surplus of 10 will go to the landlord instead of the capitalist. The surplus will accrue not because of a monopoly price. It will form because the waterfall "is a monopolizable force of Nature which, . . . is only at the command of those who have at their disposal particular portions of the earth and its appurtenances".<sup>26</sup> Natural forces—forces not due to human labor directly, forces which increase productivity

## Against the Current

and which unlike, say, photosynthesis, can be monopolized by a class do not add to the value of commodities. The market value of commodities is determined only by human labor power.

At this point it is necessary to take note of the fact that there are two types of rent that form in the production of primary commodities: Differential Rent I—which is based on natural difference of the soil; and Differential Rent II which is based on differences in the efficiency of capital. But for our present purposes, it will only be necessary to consider Differential Rent I.

### Dividing the Surplus Value Pie

As we noted earlier, it is a deeply and widely held belief shared by radical, liberal and conservative economists alike that the price of oil is a monopoly price set by the OPEC cartel, on the basis of whatever the market will bear. The difference between radicals and liberals on this issue is not in their account of price formation, but in their attitude towards the "high" price of oil. Radicals often approve it as a kind of welfare transfer payment from rich countries to the poorer ones, justified by past imperialist exploitation. Conservatives deplore it because of its effects on the domestic price level and the profit level of (corporate) consumers. "What is the appropriate long-term price of crude oil?" asks the soundly conservative *Petroleum Economist*. Their answer: "For almost any other commodity traded internationally, economic theory would suggest a straightforward reply: the long-term supply price will tend to equal the marginal cost of production. But oil is in this respect unique. Because the main exporting countries are all organized into a powerful cartel, the cost of production is virtually irrelevant. Some of the oil (e.g. that of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia) is being marketed by the exporting country at more than one hundred times the cost of production. The price which the monopolists impose on the consumer is thus purely arbitrary—so long as their cartel hangs together."<sup>27</sup>

Discounting the hyberbole which attributes a market price "hundreds" of times its cost of production to Persian Gulf oil (costs of production in 1974 averaged around 10 cents a barrel while market prices reached upwards of \$12.00 a barrel) it is nevertheless true that the market price of Saudi oil is many times the costs of Saudi production. But what is "the" cost of production? Neo-classical economics insists that all costs of production in a given industry tend toward equality.<sup>28</sup> These costs are regulated by the most efficient producer,<sup>29</sup> and moreover no distinction is made by these writers between manufactured and primary commodities. In fact, it is obviously false that there is any tendency towards the equalization of costs of production of primary commodities. As a consequence of this false assumption, present-day neo-classical economists must drag in the notion of what amounts to a permanent all-powerful cartel—admittedly a complete anomaly to explain the price of oil. By contrast, the classical/Marxian theory accounts for the price of Persian Gulf oil without any recourse to such a *deus ex machina*. The cost of production is properly understood as *unequal* for all producers and the market price is regulated by the producers operating on the basis of the least favorable conditions who are able to clear the market at a market price equal to their marginal price of production.<sup>30</sup>

So the result here is that surplus profits tend to originate more in primary commodities than in manufactured commodities because the range of cost differential is greater. The next question is, how is this surplus profit divided between capitalist and landlord? The answer of Marxian and classical economics is that competition between the capitalists for favorable mines, oil wells, agricultural land tends to send their profits towards the average rate for manufacturing. And that everything above the average rate reverts to the landlord.

Let's assume that the U.S. oil producers operating in Texas are the least favored and that their costs are 10-11 dollars a barrel; but Persian Gulf oil can be produced at 25 cents a barrel. The result, on the basis of a \$12.00 a barrel price is a differential rent of between \$9.75 and \$10.75. Who gets this rent? The Persian gulf landlords. How much of the surplus profit does the foreign oil company get? In theory *none*. They must settle for the average rate of profit on their invested capital. Now since everyone knows that the overseas oil investments of Anglo-American oil companies have been enormous, doesn't that undermine the theory of rent? I don't think so. What's required is an historical understanding of the post-world war conjuncture and the special role of Anglo-American imperialism.

The theory of rent which asserts that in the long run the operating capitalists will have to settle for the average rate of profit was developed to explain 19th century British agriculture which over a 300 year period had developed into a three class system of agricultural proletarians, "farmers" i.e., operating capitalists and landlords. The fundamental assumption of the analysis is that the capitalist farmers would compete among each other in near atomistic fashion for access to the most fertile, well-located land and that concessions on their part to get the favored land would drive their profits to a magnitude approaching the average rate of profit. Clearly, in the case of the post World War II Middle East, with raging anti-colonial movements, and with the U.S. and the British fleet the dominant powers in the Persian Gulf, the militarily impotent Saudi landlords were not in the same position as the British landed aristocracy of the 19th century. "Seven Sisters", backed by Anglo-American imperialism were thus able to enforce concessions in rent much greater than those which the British farmers were able to get. The terms have nothing whatever to do with the erstwhile ignorant Saudi's suddenly learning the principles of economics after a tour of duty at Harvard Business School, as is sometimes argued. The British aristocracy of the 19th century—and well into the 20th it must be said—clearly equalled the Saudi princes in illiteracy, hidebound traditionalism, ignorance of economic principles, etc. However, the competitive conditions of the previous period enabled them to drive a harder bargain. Gradually, however the monopoly of the Seven Sisters began to erode. The story of this erosion, accelerated by the inroads of independent oil entrepreneurs like J. Paul Getty, Armand Hammer of Occidental Petroleum, H.L. Hunt, ENI, and the Japanese has been frequently told in popular books about the oil industry. As a result of their activities, something like a market for oil concessions began to develop in the Persian Gulf: nothing like the smooth working market of 19th century British agriculture assumed by Marx and Ricardo, but enough competition so that the laws of rent



began to operate in some recognizable fashion. Evidence that these laws were in fact real could be gathered from the fact that U.S. domestic profits in oil, since 1975, have generally been higher than overseas profits, from the scramble for the assets of *domestic* oil companies like Marathon on the part of members of the Seven Sister sorority like Mobil and Gulf, by the increasing domestic concentration of U.S. oil firms on domestic fields despite their relatively high cost operation.

## International Implications of Differential Rent I

The determination of the general price of production for primary commodities by the costs of the least favored producer creates a *false social value*;<sup>31</sup> the market value of all the primary commodities produced is substantially greater than the combined costs of production. This result is attributable to the fact that only socially necessary labor creates value, not the qualities of the soil or the richness of veins of ore in themselves. These form a part of wealth, not value.<sup>32</sup> If capitalism were to be abolished, i.e., the social relations of production and distribution (wage labor, capital, landed property, interest), then society would pay the producers of Persian Gulf oil a price whose magnitude corresponded to their costs; not those costs plus an amount that is represented by the difference between the costs of the least favored producers and Persian Gulf costs.

Paul Samuelson, the most brilliant representative of the neo-classical synthesis in modern economics, puts this speech into the mouth of a critic of capitalism: "Apologists claim that competition is efficient. What nonsense! In their own textbooks they say that price is determined by the 'high cost marginal producer'. In our utopia we shall get rid of competitive markets and make price equal to costs of the lowest cost producer." To this Samuelson replies, "Now of course any thoughtful person knows that changing the social order will not increase the richness of copper seams in the low-grade mines or make all soils alike. Except to the extent that a new social order might create new motivation for enthusiastic work and education, society will still have to face the technical fact that the various sources of output have greater or lesser advantages of production. All mines cannot be equally efficient, and obviously each cannot be more efficient than the other. By a pricing system, or some other device, society must learn to live with these technical facts—and be sure to make the best of them..." *Economics*. 1961, p. 461-2. What Samuelson ignores is the fact that while socialism cannot make copper seams richer, it can abolish a price system which fails to reflect true social costs. Socialism will not lower prices to the level of the most highly favored producer, e.g., to the level of Persian Gulf oil producers. That price would hardly cover costs. Socialism instead will proportion prices to reflect actual social costs: South-western oil producers will be advanced funds sufficient to carry out their operations, while Persian oil producers will receive an amount proportionate to cover their costs of production. Such a policy is different from remunerating the producers on the basis of either the least favored producers (capitalism) or the most favored.

One consequence of commodity pricing at capitalism's false social value is that all society—both the less developed countries (LDC) and more developed countries

(MDC)—is overcharged. And what society loses in its capacity as a consumer is gained only by a fraction of society, the landlords. Capitalist property relations enrich one set of landlords and oil bureaucrats in a completely arbitrary way as a consequence of geological events occurring billions of years ago; this is an enrichment completely independent of risk, magnitude of capital, managerial capacity, or any of the traditional justifications for the appropriation of the unpaid labor time of the immediate producers.

The continued appropriation of the major share of surplus value—amounting to many times the cost of production—by a stratum of the capitalists which is thoroughly superfluous even by capitalist standards of social utility, appears to require extraordinary expenditures on military and internal security, as illustrated in the cases of the two largest oil producers, Iran and Saudi Arabia. It must be noted however that in the case of Differential Rent I *we have a transfer of wealth from the MDC's to the LDC's*. This transfer of wealth between nations is not accompanied by any means in an equalization of wealth *within* nations, including those receiving the greatest share of the oil bonanza; what we see there is greater class polarization and economic inequality.

## Conclusion

During the past decade, the world's economy has been dominated by fluctuations in oil prices which have stimulated a comprehensive looting of a significant share of the world's remaining fossil fuels. The increase in oil prices has also brought about the greatest transfer of wealth since the days of primitive capitalist accumulation. But whereas that 15th or 16th century transfer has some historical legitimation, however brutal its execution, in the case of the present transfer only an insignificant share of the wealth could be channeled into productive investment. Most has gone into fictitious capital in the form of U.S. Treasury securities and other forms of state debt, into conspicuous consumption of the most bizarre kind and, most dangerously of all, into the consumption of weaponry designed to protect the existing, outmoded relations of production. The impossibility of recycling the wealth in any substantially productive way within capitalist relations of production now threatens to bankrupt the world capitalist system and generate unemployment, pauperism and starvation on a scale unprecedented in the modern period. These results, it must be understood, have been achieved not arbitrarily, not through the willful action of small groups of Arab potentates or cliques or scheming oil executives in Houston high rises, but through the normal operation of the laws of value and rent. It is this ordinary capitalist *modus operandi* that needs again to be illuminated by revolutionary socialists.

### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The principle of universal lawfulness states that every single fact is the locus of a set of laws, whether we know the laws or not. This does not mean that facts are *determined* by laws, but simply that they exist in accordance with laws. As Mario Bunge argues, this formulation avoids the idealist doctrine, formulated by Kant and others, in which natural and social laws are not the immanent form of facts, but prescribe them from the outside. There is no "Rule of Laws," Bunge writes, "laws do not determine anything; they are the forms or patterns of determination." [1970] *Causality*. N.Y. pp. 22-23.

<sup>2</sup> See for example John Blair (1974) *The Control of Oil*. New York.

## Against the Current

<sup>3</sup> Just as Brahms 1st Symphony was called Beethoven's 10th, Karl Kautsky called Rudolf Hilferding's *Finanzkapital* "the Fourth Volume of Capital." See Karl Kautsky, "Finanzkapital und Krisen" *Neu Zeit*, No. 29, 1910/11 p. 765 and 883. For Hilferding on monopoly prices, see especially, Volume II p. 288 et seq. (1968) Frankfurt am Main.

<sup>4</sup> Sraffa tries to argue as early as 1925, in an article in Italian ("Sulle Relazioni fra Costo e Quantità Prodotta") *Annali di Economia*, that the Ricardian theory of rent cannot be made consistent with the theory of value. See Alessandro Roncaglia, "The Sraffian Contribution," in Alfred S. Eichner, (ed.) (1979) *A Guide to Post-Keynesian Economics*. White Plains New York.

<sup>5</sup> (1969) (2nd edition) *The Economics of Imperfect Competition*. New York.

<sup>6</sup> (1965) *Theory of Economic Dynamics*. See especially chapter One. Kalecki argues that the prices of manufactured goods are determined first by "costs" which are then subject to a mark-up determined by the degree of monopoly power.

$P = \mu + np$ . Where  $P$  = price;  $U$  = unit costs and  $n$  and  $m$  represent co-efficients of monopoly power.

<sup>7</sup> (1967) *The New Industrial State*. Boston.

<sup>8</sup> Not all Leftists are monopoly theorists or avoid value analysis. An outstanding exception, and a leader in the movement to develop Marxian value theory is Anwar Shaikh. See for example "Marx's Theory of Value and the 'Transformation Problem'" in Jesse Schwartz (ed) *The Subtle Anatomy of Capitalism*. 1977. Santa Monica.

<sup>9</sup> 74th Congress, 1st Sess. S. Doc. 13 Gardiner Means, "Industrial Prices and Their Relative Flexibility." The notion is that concentration causes prices to fall less than they ought to fall in an economic downturn. John Blair, a long time Democratic Party economist, employed by the Senate Anti-Subcommittee when the Democratic Party was in the majority, wrote in a book containing a forward by Means, "Although (Means) intent had been to provide a rationale for direct government intervention" in price determination "some saw in Mean's argument, a powerful microeconomic attack on concentrated industries. (1972) *Economic Concentration*, p. 420. Means achieved his "administered price" effect chiefly by ignoring the weight of raw material content in different manufactured commodities. This effect was largely corrected for in a study produced by the T.N.C.E. The result: "The changes in average realized prices with high concentration were neither significantly more or less than the changes of products with low concentration." Willard L. Thorp, "The Structure of Industry," Monograph No. 27, TNEC. 1941, p. 360.

<sup>10</sup> *Business Week*, 24 December 1979.

<sup>11</sup> *New York Times Magazine*, September 14, 1975. (Interview with Oriana Fallaci).

<sup>12</sup> 91st Cong. 1st Sess. Senate Subcommittee on Anti-Trust and Monopoly, Hearings on Government Intervention in the Market Mechanism. 1969, pt. 1 p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> (1972) p.v. *The World Petroleum Market*, Baltimore.

<sup>14</sup> See for example John Blair *Control of Oil*.

<sup>15</sup> Ten out of 52 chapters in *Capital*, III have rent or the formation of primary commodity prices as their subject. The same is true of the first chapters in *Theories of Surplus Value*, Part II.

<sup>16</sup> *Capital* II, Chapter 9. "Formation of the General Rate of Profit," esp. p. 159. For a terse summary of the process of equalization between spheres see Chapter 12 p. 208. For Marx's discussion of differences in costs (and therefore this case profits) within a sphere of production see Chapter 10, pp. 182-183. He distinguishes between three categories of producers—those operating under the most favorable conditions; those operating under average conditions; and those operating under the least favorable conditions.

<sup>17</sup> *Capital* III, Chapter 52. "The owners merely of labor power, owners of capital and land-owners, whose respective sources of income are wages, profit and ground—rent, in other words, wage laborers, capitalists and landlords constitute the three big classes of modern society based on the capitalist mode of production." The rise of urban landed property has, it could be

argued, offset the fall in the magnitude of agricultural landed capital, this fact together with the importance of rents from depletable primary commodities argues for a continuing need for a three class view of class structure in modern society.

<sup>18</sup> See *Theories of Surplus Value*, Part II, p. 130-133. Also *Capital* II, p. 7 where Marx calls the 19th century form of administered theory "bourgeois cretinism in all its beatitude." And *Capital* II p. 153 where he insists that the law of the average rate of profit is the foundation of capitalism. Marx argued that those who insisted that supply and demand determined prices rather than value were "vulgar economists", confusing appearance with reality. Moreover they didn't have a theory at all—just a more or less thorough kind of tautological reasoning. The vulgar economist, he said, was a kind of "inverted architect" who imagines that in basing the market price of a commodity by supply and demand, he has found the fulcrum "by means of which he cannot so much move the world as bring it to a standstill". *Capital* I, Penguin p. 419). Those who argue that arbitrary pricing is the norm in capitalism are no less supply and demand theorists than those who argue that supply and demand results in equilibrium. Both are "inverted architects", both are unable to account for the existence of a surplus value. Conventional marginalists simply deny there is any surplus at all. Radical marginalists, administered price theorists simply have never asked the question of how the surplus is possible in a sufficiently rigorous way to see the difficulties of their position.

<sup>19</sup> *Capital*, III, pp. 128-137.

<sup>20</sup> *Capital* III, p. 196.

<sup>21</sup> These forces—elasticity and inelasticity must be taken into account, but it must not be supposed that they operate along the continuous curves depicted by marginalists. See I.I. Rubin's discussion of the supply and demand equation in (1928) (1972) *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, Detroit, pp. 213-221. In the case of elasticity of demand, the ultimate limits are defined by class relations and therefore finally by the social relations of production; in the case of supply, elasticities limits are determined ultimately by social productivity, i.e., by value. Marginalism shades this reality by the distinction between movement "along" a curve and the "shift" of a curve.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Odell, *Oil and World Power*.

<sup>23</sup> Joe Stork (1975) *Middle East Oil and the Energy Crisis*, pp. 74-93.

<sup>24</sup> *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> Adelman, op cit. p. 75.

<sup>26</sup> Marx also suggests that surplus profits can arise from an "Absolute Rent." He argues that owing to barriers of entry, especially in agriculture, certain spheres of production are able to avoid a change in the organic composition of their capital. These spheres maintain a low organic composition. Surplus profits are thus generated in these spheres not because the market price is above value, but because it corresponds to a value which exceeds the price of production.

<sup>27</sup> *Capital* III, p. 645.

<sup>28</sup> *Petroleum Economist*, Dec. 1974, p. 442. For a similar analysis see Blair, Adelman, Tanser.

<sup>29</sup> "In competitive equilibrium marginal costs of all firms are equal." George Stigler, *The Theory of Price*, 3rd Edition, New York, 1966, p. 179.

<sup>30</sup> See Adelman, above, and Samuelson below.

<sup>31</sup> See *Capital* III, p. 658 "The price of production on the worst sort, i.e., which yields no rent, is always the one regulating the market price".

<sup>32</sup> *Capital*, III, p. 661.

<sup>33</sup> Wealth is a sum of use values, to the creation of which both land and labor contribute. Value is determined by labor alone.



"Mandel on Althusser" is a translation, by John Marot, of the first two chapters of Ernest Mandel's\* book "A Response to Louis Althusser and Jean Ellenstein" (Edition La Breche, Paris). With this article, we initiate what we hope will be a wide-ranging discussion on the problem of "the party." We hope the forthcoming discussion will not limit itself to the themes touched on by Mandel, but will go beyond them to include the specific problems of building a socialist party in the U.S., both in the long run, and in the period immediately ahead.

## MANDEL on ALTHUSSER PARTY AND CLASS

**T**he appearance of four articles by Louis Althusser in *Le Monde* entitled "What Can No Longer Continue in the Communist Party" and subsequently republished by Maspero under the same title enlarged with a lengthy polemical preface against George Marchais, (General Secretary of French Communist Party ed.) has revealed the *malaise* which currently prevails among the intellectuals of the PCF (French Communist Party). However, let there be no mistake. This is more than just a quarrel between intellectuals or a fictitious fight. Althusser and the appeal signed by 300 intellectuals have formulated only a few of the questions which thousands of Communist militants are asking themselves in the aftermath of the defeat of the Union of the Left on March 19th, 1978.

In this respect it is necessary to emphasize the significance of Althusser's evolution. For a long time he had confined himself to carrying out a theoretical struggle whose meaning was unclear to the rank and file militant and whose content was ambiguous if not apologetic. He then began to question the nature of Stalinism and the lack of any scientific (i.e. Marxist) explanation of the phenomenon of Stalinism (see his reply to John Lewis in *Essays in Self-Criticism*). But all this remained far removed from what he himself had termed the concrete analysis of a concrete situation. Even as he defended the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the debates of the French CP at the XXII Congress, he did so in such an abstract manner that it could only have had a most limited impact at the rank and file level.

This time, however, his argument has at last become a political one. Revolutionary Marxists must, therefore, very attentively examine Louis Althusser's pamphlet and his articles. They must specify their agreements and disagreements with the positions that the Marxist philosopher currently defends. These obviously only constitute a stage in the evolution of his thought and political practice. The aim of this discussion is not only to clarify ideas, but to insure that this evolution proceeds as far as possible toward a full-fledged return to Leninism, to revolutionary Marxism.

The most remarkable parts of Althusser's articles are those which unveil and denounce the internal structure and functioning of the French Communist Party. Althusser doesn't call it by its real name, a name that we know all too well and that we must proclaim out loud: It is called bureaucratic centralism, antipode of democratic centralism. In a biting style, Althusser dismantles its mechanisms: an organization of full-time officials, virtually cut off from the working class and from civil society and incapable of subsisting outside of the party apparatus; a leadership which manipulates the rank and file and ensures its own survival through the automatic cooptation of the apparatus; a freedom of "discussion" among a rank and file that is strictly compartmentalized into cells or local sections, and powerfully reinforced by the principle of unanimity (of "collegial solidarity") which the leadership observes in its relations with the base; the myth that "the party is always right" or that "the central committee

never makes mistakes," a myth which is the ideological correlative of a bureaucratic structure; a manipulative and exhortatory relationship between the party and the working class, in which the former educates the latter but never learns from it, thereby sanctioning, theoretically, the hierarchical and quasi-military relationship between the leadership and the base.

All this is correctly analyzed and denounced. We may describe these structures as Stalinist, on the condition that we do not limit our understanding of this term to the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet State, of the CPSU and of the Communist International. In truth we are dealing with an evil which is not limited to these phenomena but extends far beyond them. This evil is called the workers' bureaucracy, the bureaucratisation of large working class organizations in general. One need only take note of a recent event. At the Congress of German Trade Union Confederation, the DGB, in May 1978, where undoubtedly many important things were discussed, 90% of the delegates were officials! This "labor parliament" was in fact a parliament of labor bureaucrats.

### Two Remedies

Against this evil, two kinds of remedies may be used. The first is proposed by Althusser and is essentially political in character. It claims for itself a political theory and practice diametrically opposed to that of the Stalinist and reformist bureaucracies which is founded upon a distrust and fear of the large masses of working people.

The emancipation of the workers must be the task of the workers themselves. The revolutionary vanguard party is an indispensable instrument in achieving this task but can in no way substitute itself for the working class. A party wielding a correct revolutionary programme has a decisive advantage in the class struggle as that programme is the synthesis of all the lessons learned from past working class struggles. Its correct implementation is a function of numerous concrete factors peculiar to each situation. Moreover, new phenomena periodically arise which are unresolved at the programmatic level.

This is why the relationship of the vanguard party to the class is far more complex than the relationship between educator and educated. The educator himself constantly needs to be educated. He can only become so by correct practice within the class and in the class struggle. The only practical proof of his capacity to fulfil his role of vanguard is given by his ability to establish his political

\*Ernest Mandel is a noted Belgian Marxist economist and a leader of the 4th International.

## Against the Current

influence over ever wider layers of the working class and, ultimately, to acquire political hegemony over the majority of the workers.

We assume that in the course of this long political struggle he will have learned as much from the spontaneity of the masses and of their class struggle as he will have taught *them* wider political conceptions. This obviously does not mean an opportunist adaptation to whatever the great majority of workers happen to believe at any given moment, something which, incidentally, can change very rapidly. But it does mean lending an attentive ear to what they have to say and doing so honestly and faithfully. No long lasting and effective antidote to the evil of bureaucracy is possible without these political and theoretical elements, reinforced by a whole series of safeguards (statutory, constitutional, material). We will not dwell on them. They have been for the most part enumerated by Marx and Lenin. We will mention only one additional principle: the obligatory presence, in all legislative and executive organs of workers, organizations and of future worker's state, of an absolute majority of workers remaining in production, that is to say, of non-officials.

The second kind of remedy against the bureaucratic evil is more narrowly organizational in character. It has to do with modus-operandi of working class organizations, i.e. the preservation of worker's democracy.

In this regard the most we can do is to note Louis Althusser's timidity. Having denounced a deep-seated and institutionalized evil, he concludes with two very modest proposals: 1) opening up the pages of the communist press to debate, and 2) securing the right to obtain information horizontally in order to guarantee a truly democratic debate. We are, of course, in favor of these proposals. However, even if they are necessary to assure a minimum of workers' democracy, they are still inadequate as a solid, lasting foundation. What distinguishes democratic from bureaucratic centralism is the right, in theory and in practice, to form tendencies.

Indeed, in any really centralized organization the leadership unavoidably enjoys the advantages accorded by centralization. It obtains information, centralizes the practical experiences of the party as a whole and transmits unitary instructions to all party organs. Draft resolutions or theses circulate in the party before congresses or national conferences. These constitute the foundations for all debates.

This is not in itself an evil. It is even an advantage, an indispensable feature of any functioning organic structure. To understand the objective role of this centralization is to understand that it is not merely an 'organizational' or even administrative phenomenon, but represents a social and political necessity. What this centralization expresses is the attempt of Marxists, of communists, to overcome the fragmentation of the experience of the proletariat lived in isolation, factory by factory, industry by industry, region by region. The interest of the class as a whole is different from that of its individual sectors or components and is brought out only through centralization of the practice and the experience of the class struggle. However, the mechanisms of centralization can not be made to work solely in favor of the leadership and at the same time preserve their functional objectivity and effectiveness from a class struggle perspective, unless one adopts the absurd Stalinist thesis that the leadership is infallible.

## Minority Rights

Louis Althusser rightly rejects this thesis of leadership infallibility as a theoretical mystification. The entire history of the working class movement confirms him in this. From the moment the leadership is no longer expected to automatically formulate the correct political line on the basis of the centralized information at its disposal, the last argument in favor of bureaucratic centralism—its efficiency—collapses. From the moment the majority can be mistaken and the minority be in the right, it is useful for the party that the minority have the same possibility to influence the membership, the same access to information, the same right to draft resolutions as does the leadership. In this way the party has greater chances to both avoid mistakes and to correct them rapidly and discover their real cause.

The procedure which we have just outlined is the bare minimum necessary to form tendencies: the right of members to collectively formulate political platforms, elaborate political proposals and draft resolutions other than those of the leadership and independently of the compartmentalization of cells, localities and regions; the right to submit them to the discussion of members and the votes of congresses by virtue of their dissemination to all members of the party; election of the leadership more or less according to the number of mandates garnered by various tendencies, while at the same time guaranteeing the majority coming out of the Congress the right to lead the party; the right to defend oneself orally in preparatory Congresses, local and regional, and to be allotted the same speaking time as that of the leadership's speakers.

Without these rights, discussion forums and elimination of compartmentalization will have a largely superficial impact. In the end they will not give rank and file militants and minorities the possibility to work out programs other than those of the leadership. The latter will retain the monopoly of political direction which is meaningless if it does not have, as it does not, a monopoly on wisdom and truth. Bureaucratic centralism reproduces itself more or less automatically. The equality of the membership remains a purely formal one insofar as the membership does not possess the right of association and consultation necessary to alter the party's political line. This right remains the sole prerogative of the leadership.

## Is the Right to Form Tendencies Contrary to Leninism?

A number of objections have been raised with respect to the right to form tendencies. In the first instance it is alleged that it is contrary to Leninism, since the 10th Congress of the CPSU, at Lenin's initiative, forbade the formation of factions. In fact, the episode proves the opposite of what those who point to it seek to prove. For if factions are banned 18 years after the founding of the Party, it means that they were allowed prior to the 10th Congress and that their prohibition can only be explained with due reference to exceptional conditions. In reality, the entire history of Bolshevism is riddled with faction fights. Let us add that the 10th Congress only forbade factions and not the right to form tendencies.

At this same Congress of the CPSU where factions were banned, Lenin rejected an amendment by Riazanov eliminating the right to form tendencies i.e. the right of members in various cells, sections or regions of the party,



including members in the executive organs of the party to formulate political platforms and submit them to a vote of the Congress. Vigorously defending the right to form tendencies he wrote: "We cannot deprive the Party and the members of the CC of the right to appeal to the party in the event of disagreement on fundamental issues. I can not imagine how we can do such a thing. The present Congress cannot in any way bind the elections to the next congress. Supposing we are faced with a question like, say, the conclusion of the Brest peace? Can you guarantee that no such question can arise? We cannot give such a guarantee. (Riazanov: On one question only?) Certainly. But your resolution says: no elections according to platforms. I don't think we are in a position to prohibit this. . . . If circumstances should make for fundamental disagreements, can we prohibit them from being brought before the judgment of the whole Party. No! This is an extreme and unrealistic demand which I move to reject." (Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 32, p. 261).

Even earlier during the same debate on the banning of factions, Lenin had reminded the leaders of the Worker's Opposition of the following: "250,000 copies of the Worker's Opposition platform have been published in the Party's central organ. We have examined it from all angles and perspectives, we have elected delegates on its basis, and finally we have convened this congress which is summing up the political discussion" (Ibid. p. 267).

Moreover, at the same Congress different political platforms reflecting serious disagreements over the trade union question were put to a vote of the Congress. It then elected a new central committee according to the number of ballots garnered by each platform! Proof positive that at this Congress, the right to form tendencies was upheld not abolished.

Let us add that the prohibition of factions by the Congress was viewed as a temporary and extraordinary measure and not as a new statutory norm. The proof is that the CPSU did not request the Internationale to implement this measure.

It is then alleged that the creation of permanent tendencies leads to a situation where the "party is no longer made up of multifarious and divergent sensibilities and intellects which complement or confront one another. Thereby enriching the collectivity, but instead becomes frozen in resentment, in rancor, and in tenacious hatreds ever ready to take future revenge. . . . Discussion ceases (and) traps are set by making a mental note of an opponent's slip of the tongue which is supposed to reveal his authentic nature. . . . An outlandish picture? No. Ask about the settling of accounts between tendencies of this or that socialist local or this or that far-left organization." ("Le mecanisme de la tendance" *France Nouvelle* June 5, 1978).

There is a great deal of truth in this critique of permanent and ossified tendencies. But it speaks not to the right to form tendencies but to its abuse.

## Duration of Tendencies

Normally a tendency is formed with the approach of a congress or with an important development in the class struggle. After the congress has made its decisions, the tendency dissolves and allows the majority to implement its political line. If necessary it reconstitutes itself on the eve of the next congress and reopens the debate on the basis of newly acquired experience. Only in this way can the dialectic, "freedom of discussion to determine a line-

disciplined execution of the majority line-democratic re-examination of the line in the light of democratic experience," operate freely and constructively. At the same time, any refusal to execute the decision of the majority at a democratically elected congress where freedom of discussion has been guaranteed violates the majority's rights and as such is profoundly anti-democratic even if it is made in the name of factions or of cliques formed around "leading personalities." Here, again, it is an abuse of the right to form tendencies and not of the right itself.

Permanent tendencies mark the existence of an unhealthy situation. Certain guidelines in the exercise of the right to form tendencies are necessary. Our movement is proud of having abided by them in a most exemplary fashion: it constitutes a virtually unique example in the working class movement. We don't say that we do so in an ideal manner, or that we have the answer to everything. We are ready to honestly discuss these matters with the comrades of the communist opposition and with other currents in the worker's movement.

But one thing we are sure of. The negation, limitation or suppression of the right to form tendencies is in any case a thousand times more dangerous and destructive than its abuse. When Henri Malberg has the nerve to claim that the right to form tendencies permits neither clarity of political choices nor rapid elaboration of a political line, he is uttering a monstrous sophism. Will he dare deny that if the right to form tendencies had been respected, it might have been possible to change the German CP's obstinate 5 year line on "social fascism," a line which greatly contributed to Hitler's victory in 1933? Will he dare claim that if the right to form tendencies had been respected in the CPSU Stalin could still have pursued for 25 years agricultural policies so mistaken that they resulted in a per capita production of certain animal and vegetable products that was lower in 1953 than in 1916?

Bureaucratic centralism, the manipulation of worker's organizations by officialdom, the violation by elected officials of decisions made by congresses (a routine phenomenon in social-democracy), the stifling of free discussion and initiative in the rank and file allowing them to choose between different political lines, these are obstacles which must be fought mercilessly. If they are not overcome, neither the free development of the class struggle nor the victory of the working class can be assured.

Such is, in any case, the conclusion which we share with Louis Althusser. For us, the right to form tendencies is an indispensable precondition to successfully carry out this struggle.

## The Role of the Ranks in A United Front

The most important political stance taken by Althusser in his four articles is the one favoring unified rank and file committees in implementing a united front of organizations. In the first place he rejects a parliamentary conception of alliances understood as an agreement between political organizations "owning their electoral base" in favor of a conception of unity as "a struggle carried out by the organized section of the working class aimed at extending its influence." He then proceeds to indict the leadership of the French CP for having remained with a conception of the Union of the Left as an agreement arrived at "from the top" and concludes: "The

## Against the Current

leadership, contrary to the positions it had adopted within the context of the Popular Front of 1934-36, opposed the formation of popular committees. In fact, the leadership, instead of anchoring the unity of the left in the struggle for the masses, opted for a *struggle between organizations* under cover of remaining true to the Common Program (of CP and SP ed.). It thereby successfully replaced a unified electoralist policy . . . by a sectarian one which falsely identified the domination of one party over another with proletarian hegemony and leadership of the popular movement."

"From 1972 to 1977 nothing was done to encourage, or promote rank and file initiatives and the embryonic forms of unity between manual and intellectual workers. Worse: any proposals favoring popular committees had been rejected as they risked being *manipulated*. Now, having for so many years throttled the initiative of the masses they turned around and appealed for help to those same masses. Refusing to be *manipulated*, one ended up simply by manipulating the masses. (L. Althusser, "What can no longer continue in the Communist Party," pp. 114-115).

Let us leave aside the label suggested for the popular committees which is in any case a secondary matter. Neither should we dwell on Althusser's notion that unity at the rank and file level and negotiations between organizations are counterposed. Far from being contradictory, a united front at the base and a united front at the top reciprocally condition one another, at least partially. Failure to understand this is to risk serious sectarian deviations. We shall return to this later.

The crucial thing is Althusser's insistence on the role to be played by the organization and initiative of the masses in a unitary process arriving at "fundamentally changing" the political, economic and social conditions of France. It is a very important contribution, as important to the debate within the PCF as it is to the debate within working class and the mass movement as a whole toward understanding the causes and consequences of the electoral defeat of March 1978.

The entire history of the 20th century bears witness to this. The tumultuous intensification of the class struggle in an industrialized capitalist country, nay, more the "decisive change" of social and political structures is impossible without the extra-parliamentary mobilization and self-organization of the workers and toiling masses. (In the good old days Marxists called this "decisive change," a social revolution, a socialist revolution or—horror of horrors!—a proletarian revolution, but now "we" abandon this terminology so as not to "frighten the marginal voter" who nonetheless managed to slip through our fingers on the 12th and 19th of March 1978). (These are the dates of the 2-stage national elections in France which the left lost, even though its victory had been generally anticipated only a few months earlier. ed.)

Even a centrist such as Kautsky gave the worker's councils—soviets—a decisive role in the socialist transformation of society. The belief that one can obtain decisive change through purely electoral and parliamentary means is contradicted by the entire course of history. It identifies the political stance of ideologues calling themselves communist with that of the pre-1914 and post 1918 right wing of Social Democracy. It is not only unreal and utopian but profoundly anti-democratic.

At the root of this electoralist conception lies a congenital distrust of the masses by political general staffs

possessing the "True Science" and founded upon in the last analysis a fear of mass initiatives that might escape their control. The masses are considered too backward, too uncultured, too crude, too little conscious and too incompetent to be able to resolve the decisive problems confronting the country's future with their own initiatives and actions. Dropping a ballot in a voting booth every 4 years, this is their only, their sacred, democratic right. But letting them *directly* decide whether or not bosses are still needed or bankers, or generals or a nuclear strike force, no, this cannot be, this is too risky, too dangerous. Besides, who can fail to note that rank and file committees are ideally suited to manipulation by demagogues and ultra-leftists. Meanwhile, we all know that voters are of course never manipulated, that campaign promises are always kept, and that parliaments vote in strict conformity with the wishes of the electorate. Real power in the hands of the "experienced" politicians and none at all in the hands of the "inexperienced" masses. Here, in the nutshell, is the wisdom of our great "democrats" prudent champions of indirect but of course . . . representative democracy.

To insist on the deeply anti-democratic nature of bourgeois, petty bourgeois and reformist propaganda against direct worker's democracy, against rank and file committees, is to contribute to the indispensable and salutary task of ideological demystification. It is a shameful lie to portray the debate as one pitting supporters favoring more democracy against those favoring less. The truth is just the opposite.

Revolutionary Marxists and those in favor of the revolutionary path with the exception of Stalinist-Maoists (are they still in favor of the revolutionary path?) favor the *extension and not restriction* of rights, freedoms and political power of the masses and the citizenry not only in the economic, social and cultural realm, but particularly and especially in the political realm. They favor the transfer of power currently wielded and exercised by permanent bureaucratic apparatuses (the well-known state machinery) to masses of organized citizens elected and recallable at any moment by the will of the voters.

### The Initiative of the Masses

This is the meaning of Lenin's thesis developed in *State and Revolution*, that the worker's state, the dictatorship of the proletariat, is the first state in the history of humanity that must begin to wither away as soon as it is born. This withering away is precisely the spectacular broadening of direct democracy at the rank and file level. This becomes realizable only under definite material and political conditions: a reduction in the length of the working day, plurality of political parties and tendencies, unhindered access to the mass media, the right to exercise all fundamental democratic liberties. These desiderata are indispensable for the real, and not formal and largely bogus operation of workers' councils.

We will be told that we have skirted the more modest issue, raised by Althusser, of "popular committees." We do not believe so. There is an organic link, an internal coherence between a communist political orientation systematically favoring mass initiatives at the rank and file level and their self-organization in day to day struggles. There is an organic link between the conception, shared by Marx and Lenin, of the seizure of power by the proletariat, and the model of the Worker's State of tomorrow.



row, of socialist democracy and of socialist construction as an immediate task that we defend in the working class. Whoever does not see this coherence and seeks to sidestep it can only expect terrible disappointments not only among the masses but in the vanguard as well. It serves as a lodestar in proletarian and popular struggles even in the absence of revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situations. *The masses must learn how to organize independently*, and how can they if not through the experience of self-organization acquired in the course of struggle. Only through multiplying and generalizing the practice of holding general assemblies at the work place (and in the community, among students, etc.); only by multiplying and generalizing the practice of democratically electing strike committees by general assemblies of strikers; only by multiplying and generalizing the practice of the united rank and file committees to which Althusser refers, can this training be obtained. Worker's councils will spring up only through the accumulation of such experiences acquired bit by bit, yesterday and today.

To this unified and coherent conception of the self-organization of the masses in the course of partial struggles, of the socialist revolution and socialist construction, corresponds an equally well defined conception of what a genuine communist party is and what a genuine communist politics is. This conception can be summed up as: *The Party aids the class's self-organization and self-rule without ever substituting itself for it.* The Party argues for its (correct) political line within the committees and the councils. It can hope to win over the majority of workers to this only if conditions are favorable and if the line is correct! If it does not win them over or if it loses influence among them, then the class struggle, revolution, and the construction of socialism will enter into severe crises. These will be either partially overcome or not overcome at all. But the party must struggle in the class by political means only and never by administrative or repressive means. *All power to councils and committees not all power to the party:* such is the conclusion.

This does not at all diminish the decisive importance of the revolutionary party in the class struggle, in the overthrow of capitalism and in the construction of socialism. On the contrary, it underlines even more its vital importance. The spontaneity of the masses by itself does not and cannot solve the key problems facing the future of humanity. But a genuine communist party is nothing other than the vanguard of the working class on the road to its self-organization and self-emancipation and not the substitute or manipulator of the class. This is the essence of the question.

### **"Natural Leaders"**

Understood in this way the revolutionary party, far from being a self-proclaimed vanguard, can become one only insofar as *it wins for itself a vanguard role within the class as it really is.* There is nothing arrogant and sectarian about a vanguard proletarian leader who by definition must learn how to win the attention, the esteem and finally the political trust of his fellow workers. He does so not merely thanks to his militancy, but by his knowledge, his tactical and organizational abilities, and his personal gifts as a "natural leader." He must be the product of an authentic process of selection within the class.

An authentic communist party is one which gathers within it the maximum number of "natural leaders" of the working class at the work place. It gives them the education and political experience necessary for them to transcend their narrow personal experiences, inevitably fragmentary, so that they may contribute the entire range of their own experiences and initiatives toward not only consolidating and building their party, but equally toward the development of the consciousness of the class as a whole. For this they must be able to exercise their judgement and retain a critical and independent intellect.

Here we are at the heart of the matter. No qualitative progress is possible either in building such a communist party or allowing free scope to the class struggle without an unbridled development of the most varied forms of workers' independent organizations, that is, without unified rank and file committees. By refusing to encourage the formation of "popular committees" the leaders of the PCF had right from the start contributed decisively toward the failure of effecting the "important change" and getting rid of the Giscard-Barre regime in France, regardless of the future evolution of social democratic leaders and their tactical stance with respect to the PCF.

Behind this refusal lies a whole series of fundamental, strategic alternatives and choices which Althusser does not analyze but which we will have to dwell on. They are tied to the very nature of the "change" that is sought.

There is a reason here to bring to light a striking contradiction in the position that the leadership of the PCF defends. Speaking at the festival of *Avantgarde* George Marchais exclaimed: "Look at what's happening right now. Everywhere, in every organization, in every region, discontent is growing and the struggle takes on a sharpness, a militancy and a determination rarely attained."

Now this tide of discontent and protest is not solely directed against individual employers, against lay-offs and speedups, against the nibbling away of purchasing power and deteriorating conditions of work and life. It is also aimed at the government's policies as a whole, particularly at the scandalous rate hikes in the public services and in price increases which were implemented by Barre after an electoral campaign where such inflation, it was said, would come only in the event of a victory of the Left.

Marchais recognizes that this vast movement of protest is in fact the 3rd run-off of the elections, a defiant protest against bourgeois rule. But how can one take it on by isolated and fragmented strikes? Isn't it obvious that the protest movement must be unified and centralized in order for it to reach its goal. Isn't it obvious that very important allies of the working class must join this movement: women, youth, environmentalists? Isn't it right to think that this unification can only occur within the framework of unified rank and file committees when it has utterly failed to occur within an electoral one? We wager that George Marchais, in between insults and slander about the manipulation of dissidents within the PCF by the bourgeoisie, will most likely refuse to answer such a clear and elementary question. In one fell swoop he will have shown just who—Marchais himself, the communist dissidents or the far left—is side-stepping the burning questions of the moment: how to get rid of Giscard-Barre and their policies responsible for misery and oppression.

# Women, the Right, and the Family

by Johanna Brenner

Of all the reactionary programs and ideas characterizing today's right-wing movement, the attraction of its pro-family, anti-feminist politics is hardest to understand. How do such backward looking and unrealistic ideas come to dominate political discussion in the 1980's—especially when so many of the right's concrete demands are supported by only a small minority. The majority of men and women oppose making abortion illegal; support sex education; support the ERA. And why, when so many of the concrete demands of the feminist movement have support is there such reluctance to publicly affirm and fight for the values and ideals which those demands presumably express?

That men might be attracted to a politics that aims to restore their privilege and authority over women in society and within the four walls of the home seems natural. But this movement is attracting women—who seem to make up in fact, the majority of its active ranks. It would be comforting to dismiss this as a reaction by middle and upper class housewives whose privileged position, derived from their husbands' high incomes, is threatened by a feminism which demands that women exercise responsibility for our own fate, reject dependence on men, work for a living, and take a role in public life. While it may be that activists are drawn from this pool of women (who have the time to get involved), unfortunately, the return to the traditional family has a much broader appeal, reaching well into the working class.

## Painful Transition

One way to understand what's happening to us and our movement is to see that neither the active commitment of anti-feminists nor the profound ambivalence of many of our own supporters is an entirely irrational response to the problems emerging out of revolutionary changes in the status of women and in the viability of the traditional nuclear family. In the last decade, culminating a long process of change, women have finally been freed from a legally and culturally enjoined submission to the authority of one man, only to find ourselves made available for exploitation by men in general. This is so, because the changes in women's position have taken place within capitalist society and especially a capitalist society in economic decline.

Up until World War II, the vast majority of white women spent their lives as dependent housewives, locked into a marriage which legally enforced their submission to their husbands. The traditional marriage offered women an alternative to working for wages in order to gain their livelihood. In this sense, until recently women have not been fully proletarianized. The social changes that are vastly altering marriage and the family may then be understood as a moment of historical transition which like other such moments, is at the same time progressive in the long run and painful for the individuals living through it.

Adapting Marx's discussion of the creation of the male working class out of the feudal peasantry, Muriel Nazzari tells us:

For woman to become a free seller of labor power who carries her commodity wherever she finds a market, she

must further have escaped from a regime of marriage where her husband has priority over her labor and where rules and regulations restrict her freedom. Hence, the historical movement which changes wives into wage workers appears on the one hand as the emancipation from patriarchy and the fetters of marriage. . . . But on the other hand, these new freed women become sellers of themselves only after they have been robbed of all the guarantees of existence offered by the old marriage arrangements. (Muriel Nazzari, "The Significance of Present-Day Changes In the Institution of Marriage," *The Review of Political Economics*, Vol 12 No. 2, Summer 1980.)

For example, changes in divorce and marriage law proclaiming the equality of partners have essentially freed men from any obligation to support their divorced wives (the displaced homemaker syndrome), while wives are now held responsible for all debts incurred by their husbands during marriage whether they themselves were working or not. Abstract legal equality has been used to strike down protective legislation for women workers (rather than extending those protections to men). Without changes in the pay and working conditions of many typical women's jobs, the freedom to work can mean the freedom to be poor.

## Traditional Marriage

For most of the 19th century in the US, women had very little choice, legally or actually, but to marry, and once married, had few rights and no redress from their husbands' authority. The husband had custody of his wife's person, sole ownership of her estate, absolute rights to the product of her industry (her wages), the right to decide where they would reside, etc. By the end of the century, many of these restrictions had been removed. And in 1919, women's right to vote had been won. But two crucial rights—divorce and abortion—remained denied to women.

In addition, economic opportunities were limited to the traditional "women's industries, such as garment and textiles. Although jobs for women increased immensely with the expansion of white collar work at the turn of the century, most of these new women workers remained young or single. Marriage and childbirth still marked the end of a woman's work for wages outside the home.

Legal relationships—the definition of the duties of the wife and the husband in the marriage contract, the denial of divorce, the illegality of abortion—were reinforced by economic realities—women's jobs were low paying and barely supported a single person, let alone children. The



few welfare services offered were stingy, humiliating and authoritarian. People who could not support themselves with wages—old people, women with children, the unemployed, the sick and infirm, etc.—were considered to be the responsibility of their families, not of the community or the state. Thus, women can hardly be said to have had a “free” choice either to marry or to stay married—marriage was only the best of a series of bad alternatives.

It is true that wives often worked for wages at least for part of their lives and that they have often contributed to family income in other ways—homework, laundry, boarders, etc. But this does not alter the fact that they had a legal a moral claim to be supported by their husbands (a claim that for a substantial minority, of course, was not always successful). And as working class living standards gradually improved, more and more men in fact earned a “family wage.” The exchange of material support by men in return for services by women within marriage allowed women to survive without full-time wage work.

This was not true for Black women. Most Black men did not make a “family wage” and Black women have always had to work. In this, and many other ways, racism has determined Black women’s different experience and thus their different relationship to feminism. The experience and consciousness of Latin women have differed from that of both Black and white women.

## The New Double Exploitation

The long-term development of capitalism and of the forces of production undermined this system. Clerical and service jobs in the private sector increased enormously in the post-World War II economic expansion. The baby boom and the rise of liberalism increased jobs in nursing, education, social work, etc. The pool of single women was soon exhausted, opening opportunities for married women to return to work. From the “supply side,” the development of better household technology and substitutes for domestic labor (washing machines, packaged prepared foods, etc.) made it physically easier for women to perform two jobs—their domestic work and wage work.

Increasing opportunities for an independent existence laid the basis for the re-emergence of feminism. In turn, the women’s movement accelerated the erosion of the traditional family arrangements. The break-up of the support-in-exchange-for-services marriage is progressive to the extent that it releases women from a debilitating economic dependence on men which forms the base for our social, cultural, and political subordination. But it only provides the necessary condition for women’s liberation. Without other fundamental social changes, the demise of the old system by itself does not free women and in certain respects has contradictory impact. While both legal and economic changes have in some ways provided women with more choices, they have also robbed women of protections which are not available elsewhere, increasing our vulnerability.

The sexual revolution, coupled with women’s liberation, has deprived individual men of exclusive “rights in use” of women’s sexuality. In the support-for-services marriage, services include sex. This patriarchal power within the family is reflected in the exclusion of sex from “respectable” public life. The preservation of male power

within the family and over individual women requires that women be the private property of individual men. That in turn means that women in general cannot be public goods. But under capitalism, the gradual liberation of women from this form of control has hardly freed us from sexual exploitation. Rather, female sexuality is now free to be completely exploited—it becomes a public good available to any man who can afford to purchase it. In the context of capitalism, the sexual revolution opens the door to the explicit sexual degradation of women, not just in dark corners and dim alleyways but in mass media and mass culture. Brooke Shields and her Calvins jeans ad (“Nothing comes between me and my Calvins”) has brought kiddie porn to TV. Meantime, your local swingers bar offers male nude dancers for women to ogle on the nights when it doesn’t offer female mud wrestlers.

The final irony: women’s equality appears, as the triumph of the “male principle” over the “female”: women may now take the same predatory attitude to men that men have historically taken to women. The old laws and mores which attempted to force men to live up to some responsibilities to women by defining women as inferior and in need of protection have given way. But with nothing to replace them, the inevitable consequence seems to be necessarily a society of atomized individuals each regarding the others as means to ends. Many women sense—and correctly—that in this game they can only be the losers.

The meaning capitalism imposes on women’s equality—on the undermining of individual men’s power over women—has determined that women must have a profoundly ambivalent attitude toward the traditional family and the values associated with it. Freedom and security, personal needs and social responsibilities, individual fulfillment and long-term commitment, sex and love seem to be unalterably counterposed. The only free woman appears to be the one who refuses to have children or to make any long-term commitments that might limit her ability to support herself. That women might refuse to bear and nurture children, refuse to “take care,” frightens everyone—since it is pretty clear that men won’t/can’t do it. (Even for men the trade-offs are poor. In “Kramer vs Kramer” the guy has to accept a set-back to his career to be a good parent.)

The ending of the support-for-services type of family in favor of more equal, less obligatory, and less secure, relationships would always carry with it a risk as well as a promise. It would inevitably provoke opposition—but I think that in prosperous times the opposition would not have won the wide support it seems to have won today. Recessions and depressions are good for innovation only insofar as they spawn oppositional mass movements. Lacking such movements, the current capitalist crisis has vastly increased the stakes of innovation and aggravated the contradictions between our “longing for freedom” and our “need for security.”

## The Feminization of Poverty

Without a collective working class response to the employers’ attack on wages and working conditions, competition between working people has intensified. As everybody fights to hold onto their share of the pie, the world outside the family becomes more and more a war of each against all. If “one is the loneliest number,” it’s alot lonelier now. People seem to need families, to need someplace that can shelter them, more than ever. Mean-

## Against the Current

while, as the employers succeed in driving wages down, more and more married women are being forced to work whether they want to or not. This is most clear in the rapidly increasing labor force participation of wives with children under six (historically the group least likely to work, since they are also the group with the heaviest domestic responsibilities). For these women, whose home-work schedule ranges between 40 and 50 hours a week in addition to their jobs, earning their own wages rather than being "only" a dependent housewife may be more of a burden than a blessing.

At the same time, the "feminization of poverty" expresses the fate awaiting many women outside marriage. In 1977, 42% of women-headed families were poor. And it's getting worse: between 1969 and 1978 the average income of these families dropped 8% behind the cost of living. Breaking out of the dependent housewife role—either within or without marriage—does not always improve the quality of women's lives. It can mean tremendously burdensome work, poverty, the elimination of leisure. In a declining economy particularly, the prospects for women outside the traditional family appear bleak indeed.

Of course vast numbers of women are nonetheless braving these consequences, finding them better than sticking with an oppressive family situation. For women who "choose" to live alone (however reluctantly) the women's movement which legitimizes this decision, which insists on our right to be single and to be sexually active without being married, which works for greater opportunities for us in the job market, which fights for child care, etc. is a positive force. In fact, it's important for us to remember that feminism has a broad constituency. The women's liberation movement can speak to the needs and hopes of many women. And although many women feel confused and ambivalent, few want to simply turn the clock back to the days when we could aspire to nothing more than to sacrifice all our needs to our husbands and children, when a woman could not admit to sexual desire, when abortion was illegal, when it was illegitimate for women to demand a living wage, etc.

Yet clearly, for most women there is no long-term alternative to marriage and family—and women keep searching to make the family work for us. Most divorced people remarry, half within five years of their divorce. In one way it makes no sense to talk about the breakup of the family if that means the family as an institution. Individual families are unstable (it is estimated that close to half of all children born in the 70's will spend some time in single parent homes). But the basic living unit of two married adults and their children endures. On the other hand, this unit is much more voluntary than in the past. That means women can leave. But it also means that women can be left. Given the poor situation of women without a man for support, it is hardly surprising that many women are terribly frightened that this might happen to them and want very much to somehow recreate the old trade-offs.

### Left "Friends of the Family"

The left has been disoriented in the face of these problematic developments. Clearly, the simple position of "smash monogamy" will not do. To celebrate the demise of the heterosexual two-adult family because it has been oppressive to women without discussing the real consequence for women and proposing alternative ways to

meet the genuine needs the family currently satisfies (albeit inadequately) plays into the hands of the right. On the other hand, to try to steal the family away from the right, as Lerner and Zoloth do with their "Friends of the Family" strategy in *In These Times* is simple opportunism and also ultimately plays into the hands of the right. They argue, in part correctly, that people are responding to the defense of the family because the family is the place where one is "supposed to get nurturing and love regardless of one's actual achievements in the world . . . where human love and intimacy can be treated as the highest value." But they incorrectly conclude that the left can challenge the right by saying that we too want to preserve the family as the principle site for "nurturing and love regardless of achievement" and that we know better than the right how to make families work. They want to "restructure the economic and political fabric of American society" as the best way to defend the positive aspects of family life. In other words, a main reason for socialism is to preserve the heterosexual nuclear family (as well, of course, as the single person, gay, lesbian, single parent, etc. household—insecurely tacked on at the end).

By making the preservation of the heterosexual nuclear family the centerpiece of its program, "Friends of the Family" must necessarily end up (whatever its intentions) fudging on the feminist critique of the traditional family and dragging its heels on questions like abortion and gay and lesbian rights. Moreover, their approach undermines our ability to connect the need for socialism to individuals' desire for a rich and rewarding life; for it accepts the fundamentally bourgeois idea that human meaning and fulfillment can be centered in private life—that public life is necessarily impoverished.

Nonetheless, "Friends of the Family" does attempt to deal with the real attraction the idea of family has for people. We have to find a better strategy for doing the same thing.

### Transcending the Split Between Family and Public Life

That we have been floundering up till now reflects I think the decline of the left and women's movements but also what's actually happening in feminists' own lives.

We have—quite naturally knowing you can't beat the system all by yourself—turned to somewhat less-traditional but still couple-defined family situations and especially to motherhood. (I think this is almost as prevalent among lesbians as among straight women.) There has been a baby boom on the left over the last few years. Partly this is biological—the "up against the clock" syndrome affecting the 60's generation. But it also reflects a more conscious decision by socialist-feminist women that motherhood is just about the most creative thing we can do. Women on the left (and men for that matter) have reacted to the difficulty of really finding themselves in "public life"—in work, in political activity—and are looking to motherhood as one area of non-alienated labor. Unfortunately for the children, the kids have to carry the burden of being their parents main creative work. This is not to say that the desire to have children can in any sense be illegitimate. Wanting to be a parent can express positive human impulses—to nurture, to care for someone besides yourself, to make an im-



portant social contribution. But, I contend, the emotional content of this decision by so many feminist women goes far beyond these impulses—for there are many different ways of realizing them—at least in theory—besides producing and raising your very own child.

It seems to me that the hard personal choices we are all forced to make, coupled with the very definite conservative environment we face, has disarmed the left. We have allowed the pressures from the right to rob us of our capacity to envision a different world, to insist on our vision as the only rational way out of the current crisis, and to use that vision to explain and motivate the reform struggles in which we engage. We want to fundamentally alter the current system not, as "Friends of the Family" argues, in order to preserve the traditional family but to transcend it.

We want to win a society in which the family as a special place where you are nurtured unconditionally is unnecessary—because you are nurtured everywhere. We want a society where commitments are not enforced but are freely chosen because they make absolute sense for people. In other words, we want to break down the divisions that define life under capitalism: between self and community, between nurturance and personal fulfillment, between a public life that is competitive, hierarchical and soul-destroying and a private life that has to compensate—but cannot.

## The War of Twos Against Twos

Today it appears that only in family and private life are we directly connected to others. In public life our relations to other people are more indirect. In an economy organized around a highly sophisticated division of labor based on production for a market, interconnectedness comes about through competition. This characteristic of capitalism not only demarcates the family and close personal relationships as one of the few areas of solidarity for people, but it also inevitably forces those relationships to meet many other needs—especially the needs of dependent, non-wage earning people which the production for profit system will not meet. And it inevitably defines those relationships in fundamentally bourgeois ways.

Because intimate ties of solidarity between individuals involving long-term commitments, love and acceptance (which ideally characterize the family), coexist alongside the more typical contractual and competitive relationships of bourgeois society, family ties tend to reinforce rather than break down the individualism and alienation of public life. Even though the family based on a monogamous bond between two adults who undertake to care for themselves and their own children is not a contractual relationship, it fits well into an atomized society of contracting individuals. In forming families, we seem to only change the war of each against all into a war of twos against twos. This was well expressed by a working wife when she was asked whether the possibility of her making more than her husband might disrupt their relationship. Not at all, she replied: "We identify with each other . . . We will be in competition together against some other person, not in competition with each other."

Of course, commitment to one person is not automatically exclusive of ties of solidarity with others (although there is always some tension between different claims on our time and energy). But in this society they tend to be counterposed. And because other kinds of solidarity *normally* appear to be so much more tenuous

than those built around the love and intimacy of the family, people are continually drawn back toward the family rather than toward other kinds of networks. (This is probably less true of gay and lesbian couples or single mothers living together. Precisely because these families have less resources and less social acceptance than heterosexual families, they are forced to depend more on wider networks and communities which are oppositional communities almost by definition.)

I have focused on this problem of intimacy and nurturance, because it is one of the strongest arguments for the family, pulling people toward it even when they reject a lot of right-wing ideology. People want their lives to include long-term commitment to others, the assumption of social responsibilities and social contributions, expressed, for example, in raising children.

But much more important for making the family a political rallying cry today is that families combine long-term personal commitment with long-term financial commitment. In tough times, as individuals become increasingly insecure and feel themselves pitted against each other, families become increasingly important. However, while capitalist society in crisis intensifies competition it also creates the conditions for the emergence of new forms of solidarity. Capitalism divides people as competitors selling their labor power, but it also unites them as interconnected producers, making possible the development of collective oppositional movements based on common class experience. This form of solidarity, unlike that of the family, does not fit into an individualistic world view.

Of course, some class organizations, such as trade unions, can express primarily sectoral interests and are not necessarily class conscious. But trade unions are premised on the need for broader long-term commitments beyond purely personal connections and on collective struggle—the family is not. It is "no accident" that when people are engaging in collective struggle, they are most open to social and cultural innovations which break through the fundamental individualism of personal life in capitalist society. In this way did the Polish workers' movement give birth to a live feminist movement in Poland. And so too did the revival of the New Left in the '60s contribute to the rise of today's women's movement. Collective and communal forms of social life that allow real choice and individual freedom for the many rather than the few appear as a logical extension of the way people are already acting in organizing their struggle.

## Toward A Strategy

So what does all this imply about a feminist strategy against the right's pro-family politics? Well, I suggest that *our* opening is precisely the dilemmas that capitalist society creates for people. Today women (and men) are faced with choices they do not want to make but must, impossible choices in which we have to sacrifice one human need in order to fill another. Our job is to propose concrete reforms which allow people to get beyond those dilemmas. As much as possible, we should try to make these reforms "pre-figurative", anticipations of the kind of social/personal relationships and of the re-ordered priorities we want to win.

For example, we want not just any form of childcare but parent and worker-controlled community, and workplace based, and affordable childcare. And we need to put these demands into an anti-capitalist, pro-woman poli-

## Against the Current

tical framework. This political framework must offer a vision of democratic and participatory institutions to meet real life needs, replacing of the fundamentally hierarchical and privatistic institutions—including the isolated nuclear family—that we have. This framework has to insist that the conflict women face between being nurturant and being autonomous is not inevitable but an effect of the way society is organized: the way production is organized, the way work is organized, the way our daily survival needs are met. We have to insist that the road to a more human society is not through forcing women back into the kitchen but by making the one-family kitchen obsolete. And until that's possible, by making everybody—husbands, kids, etc.—share responsibility for family care. This would require: paying women enough so that we can substitute commodities for domestic labor (laundry, eating out, etc.); giving parents paid time off for family responsibilities, by flex-time so that work schedules match kids' school schedules, and so on. (Eliminating the kitchen, by the way, is not as utopian as it seems. In World War II, women workers in war industries not only got child care but had whole meals cooked for them to take home.)

We want to insist that the best way to protect women is not to return to the stifling paternalism of the past (which never protected all of us anyway) but to pay us a living wage so we can stand on our own ground, making relationships out of desire and not out of economic necessity. At the same time we have to contest the abstract legalistic notion of women's equality which treats divorced housewives as if they had been free and equal partners in the marriage contract. ("The right to contract is also the right to make a bad bargain".)

We can't afford a failure of nerve at this point. A right-wing victory on abortion or on any aspect of the Family Protection Act—limiting access to abortion, contraception and sex education for teenagers, denying lesbian and gay rights, reimposing the unchallenged authority of men over women and children within the home, etc.—will be a terrible set-back. We have already suffered some defeats such as the Hyde amendment. We have to concentrate our forces on defending our past gains because these gains make it possible for us to go further. We can't turn away from reform struggles organized by the women's liberation and gay liberation movements because they are not "mainstream". Instead we have to work within the framework of women's liberation and gay liberation politics, making those movements broad movements that clearly address real needs with collective solutions.

I am not going to go into all the different areas and programmatic ideas for each. They demand more time and space than I have here—and they are not all simple questions—I don't want to pretend that we have all the answers. I think, though, that the direction is already there. The women's movement has been debating and developing feminist answers to many of these concerns: for example, how to fight for abortion rights without seeming to be anti-child; how to fight against the degradation of women in pornography and the media without aligning with the right's anti-woman, anti-human sexual repressiveness, and so forth. To give a better sense of the direction I'm talking about I'll just expand a little on these two areas.

The Reproductive Rights National Network organizes for abortion rights by coupling it to a broader concept of

reproductive freedom. In the first place, we always talk about abortion linked to sterilization abuse—the right of women to choose to have as well as to not have children. And in the second place, we argue that the way to ensure that children are brought into the world, loved and respected is not to make motherhood compulsory by denying women the right to abortion but to make parenting easier. Parenting has to be something that men as well as women do. Being a parent has to be made less burdensome on both men and women—paternity-maternity leaves, flex-time jobs, part time jobs with full benefits etc. Child rearing has to be organized in a different way around different values—children need supportive adults but they don't need to be (s)mothered. Childcare has to be recognized as a social responsibility.

A feminist response to women's concern about sexual exploitation in the media separates us from the right in many ways: by focusing on violence and objectification of women rather than on sexual expression per se; by linking the demand for an end to exploitative and objectified portrayals of women's sexuality to the demand for an acceptance of gay and lesbian sexuality and gay and lesbian rights; by insisting on a strategy not of state censorship but direct action which requires women to mobilize; by demonstrating that it is impossible to separate sexual exploitation of women from the production-for-profit system and its needs (because it is perpetrated by powerful multi-billion dollar industries—advertising, entertainment, cosmetics, clothing, etc.).

## Community of Struggle

Linking concrete reforms to a vision of a different kind of society is our programmatic task. But I think it is not the full answer to stopping the right. It's important to have good ideas—ideas for action, ideas that point to a better world for everyone. But the appeal and relevance of our ideas will be immensely strengthened by the recreation of an anti-capitalist movement in this country. In this sense, unlike the '60s, the women's movement and the working class movement will necessarily stand or fall together. By this I do not mean that one takes priority over the other. But I do believe that the development of a collective working class response to the employers offensive will immediately change the terms of the debate on the family. For, as I tried to argue, both the material (economic, if you will) and ideological power of the family (its attraction) rests on the atomization and individuation of the rest of social life. In the context of new collective experiences, the idea of the family as the sole safe relationship loses its force. Friendship, comradeship, brotherhood and sisterhood, networks, and communities of struggle are alternative source of support and nurturance for individuals.

Public life can become less of a jungle of individual competition for survival. The real alternative for addressing the problems of alienation and insecurity, which are the wellspring of the right's success today, is the redevelopment of solidarities of collective struggle that can make the kinds of changes we stand for seem possible. Social movements offer individuals in practice an alternative form of support and solidarity—in the here and now—solidarities that not only meet present needs but that prefigure the loving, committed, and free associations that we intend to win and which are an integral part of our socialist vision.



# PATCO

by The Editors

Two events of great significance to the American labor movement took place toward the end of 1981—the Solidarity day march organized by the AFLCIO last Sept. and the total destruction of a union, PATCO.

The solidarity march, unexpectedly 400,000 strong (including thousands from the black, women's and anti-nuke movements), expressed the belief of the *most advanced* ranks of labor that Reaganism was a mortal danger to the labor movement. To these participants, the march was an invitation to the AFLCIO leadership to lead a real struggle against Reagan. A symbolic and vital start of just such a fight would have been an all-out defense of PATCO "by all means necessary."

No such thing happened. Instead, apart from pious resolutions, the AFLCIO allowed PATCO to go down the drain with barely a whimper.

It must be said that the capitulation—there is no more polite or diplomatic word for it—was joined in by the entire leadership, including those who many on the left looked to for real leadership—labor leaders, Winpisinger, and Fraser.

Winpisinger's policy on PATCO was particularly noteworthy. He speaks of himself as a socialist. He has opposed the arms budget. He has spoken out against the class collaborationist tendencies within the AFL-CIO, and insisted that capital and labor must be adversaries, not collaborators. Furthermore, his union, the IAM, was particularly well situated for the PATCO strike. It has 40,000 organized mechanics in the airports. Eight of the twelve major airlines are completely organized. The IAM was therefore in a position to close down the airports (which PATCO could not do) and could easily have paralyzed the airline industry.

What was Winpisinger's response to the PATCO workers' request for support? He declared himself in full support and sent a letter to every airport IAM local, calling on them to give the fullest support to PATCO, *with the small proviso that under no conditions should they take job actions*. This was followed by Winpisinger's public pronouncement that every IAM local was free to "act according to their consciences" on the PATCO strike. This could of course be interpreted in two ways—as encouragement to act, or as a form of legitimization for those who did not want to do anything. The test came when the San Jose, Calif., IAM, under pressure from its ranks, actually demanded that the International give them support in attempting to shut down the local airports. Winpisinger's response was a prudent silence.

The labor hierarchy's inaction was all the more dangerous in that it was clear from the very first that the PATCO strike was over more than the right of public employees to strike. It was shaping up to be a major test of the ruling class and Reagan's program for bludgeoning workers (both union and non-union), imposing cuts in their standard of living (through reduction in wages, benefits, health and safety, social services) in order to restore profitability to American business.

In allowing PATCO to go under, the leadership was signalling both those elements of the rank and file who might be inclined to fight back, and the ruling class as well, that there would be no fightback anywhere else—not on wages, plant closings, or working conditions. Instead the leaders of the teamsters, steelworkers, meatpackers, rubber workers, airline workers, are making concessions to the employers in the hope that the employers will be reasonable. In fact, each round of concessions only whets the appetites of the corporations for more, while undermining the ability of the unions to resist further demands.

The passivity of labor officialdom in the face of attacks is not difficult to comprehend when one takes a careful look at their alternatives, and the consequences of implementing them.

To start with, to engage in the kind of solidarity actions necessary to win the PATCO strike and wage war against "concessions" elsewhere, the unions would have had to consider a whole range of tactics such as: mass picket lines, sympathy strikes, plant occupations, breaking injunctions, secondary boycotts, etc. In other words, they would have had to have been ready to break the law and build the broadest and most militant solidarity actions far beyond the established lines of union jurisdiction. This is what striking workers did routinely in the formative days of the labor movement—days when the unions were much weaker than today, and in which the ever-present possibility of defeat were even greater.

It must be emphasized that in the period of the PATCO strike, the union officials had more than the usual opportunities to organize such actions. 150,000 workers answered the officials' call to march on Labor Day in New York, to give a sign that labor remained a significant force. Above all, the huge turnout on Solidarity Day in Washington, D.C., offered the labor officials an unusual chance to make clear the significance of the PATCO strike for Reagan's anti-labor offensive and to begin to build concrete actions to win that strike. Yet, the officials dispelled any hopes that they might pursue that course, when they announced that the next mass labor solidarity action—"Solidarity II"—could take place on... Election Day, 1982. That is, they actively discouraged any possible mobilization by the ranks and shifted the scene of battle to the halls of Congress and to a renewed reliance on the Democratic Party.

To counterpose the class struggle to the political struggle would of course be self-defeating. The latter is an essential aspect of the former. But successful political action requires mass action in the streets. Moreover, effective action on the shop floor and in the communities implies a working class political policy as well—that is, a break with the bankrupt policy of supporting the Democrats and a move toward independent political action.

## Against the Current

Of course the labor leaders are perfectly aware of these alternatives. They chose not to use them because of what they perceived to be the risks of such actions. For one, it raises the possibility of counter-escalation by the employers, and the risk of decisive confrontations. This could mean jeopardizing the very existence of the union organizations on which the leadership's power & status are based. Faced with this possibility, the AFLCIO hierarchy prefers to cut its losses, retreat, hoping for a better day (which they define as: a democratic president, and an end to the stagnation of American industry and its low profits.)

Furthermore, to carry out new, aggressive tactics, the leadership would have had to mobilize the ranks. From their viewpoint, they have reason to hesitate before doing so. For the leadership's position as broker of labor peace, as defenders of the sacred contract, would be threatened if the rank and file once mobilized decided that the strategy and tactics needed to win the PATCO strike could also be used to defeat Ford and GM, and even to organize the unorganized..

Finally, the leadership's failure to act is shaped by their commitment to capitalism, to profitability as the starting point of labor negotiations. As a result, they have become important, de facto conveyors of capitalist ideology and interests into the working class. For decades they have preached the notion that employer profits are the guarantee of rising wages and benefits. So, "don't kill the goose that lays the golden eggs."

It cannot be denied that many workers share this view. This makes it all the easier for the leadership to acquiesce in give-backs. At the same time it should be recognized that many workers are more ambivalent about the need for concessions. The leadership's refusal to act serves then to dampen fightback tendencies when they do arise.

The labor leadership is caught in a bind. They are as afraid of the consequences of success as they are of the consequences of failure. They cannot conduct a fight against the cuts without challenging the central importance of profitability. So they see no choice but to accept the demands of the government and corporations and try to convince themselves that the wholesale destruction of PATCO and the piecemeal destruction of the UAW, the Teamsters and others does not truly threaten the existence of the unions. It is the ranks who will pay the chief price for this built-in shortsightedness.

None of this is to suggest that no section of the union leadership can or will respond to the crisis of the unions. But the events of the past six months lend strong support to our view that a positive response even by a section of the leadership, (however partial that response will be) will only occur when a new and independent upsurge of the ranks takes place. How such a new movement of the ranks will occur, what strategies and policies it will have to adopt and develop, these are vital questions which the pages of ATC must address. We invite others in the left and the labor movement to participate in this process.

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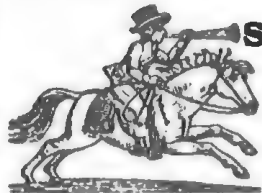
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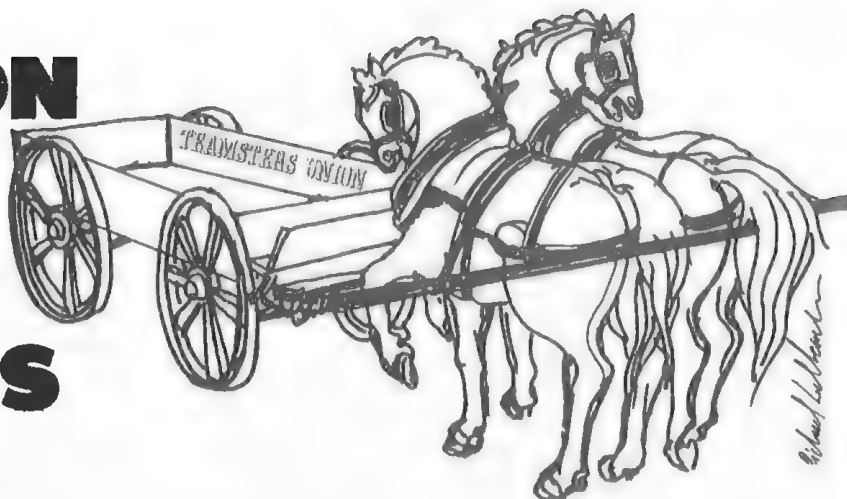
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# THE TDU CONVENTION — AND THE FIGHT AGAINST GIVE-BACKS

by Steve Zeluck



**W**hen one thinks of an industry and union in crisis today, one is likely to think first of auto and basic steel. But in the last three years, the trucking industry has joined that select list with a vengeance.

It was not always so. Till recently, there were several unique features about the industry. For one, as a rapidly growing industry for three decades (partly at the expense of the railroads), and as an industry with a government-protected, semi-monopoly rate structure, the trucking companies could more easily afford to come to high-wage agreements with the teamster union. This fact, not to speak of the corrupt and strong-arm character of the union, would hardly lead one to expect a strong rank-and-file movement.

And yet, again uniquely, such a movement did arise. Indeed, it is probably the only significant *lasting* rank and file group in the current American labor movement. Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) currently claims 7000 dues paying members, mainly in the high wage trucking divisions of the union. Each year, since 1975, about 400 teamsters have gathered in convention. TDU's paper, Convoy-Dispatch, has a press run of some 70,000 copies. The organization is recognized by the national media as a factor in the union.

But this uniqueness was not to last. For in 1981, TDU met in the midst of immensely destabilizing changes within the trucking industry—developments which are in turn a response to the more general crisis of US capitalism. It is therefore necessary to address this crisis in the industry if we are to understand what happened at the TDU convention.

## DEREGULATION and DEPRESSION IN TRUCKING

As the crisis of profitability (the lack of it) began to deepen within the US economy, the corporations began to seek ways of cost-cutting. One obvious way was to cut transportation costs by ridding US industry of the burden of the semi-monopolistic high prices which the trucking industry had imposed on the US economy. As a result, we witnessed the successful gang-up by US industry and commerce on the trucking industry, and the deregulation of that industry. In this case, it was not foreign competition which forced the restructuring of the industry, but a struggle between different sectors of domestic capital.

The consequences of deregulation and recession were devastating. Under regulation, the normal tendency for the concentration of the industry into fewer and fewer giant firms had been slowed down, since the smaller firms had a cushion against competition. But with deregulation, the tendency to concentration entered a new and virulent phase. Four of the giants alone have opened or will shortly open 500 new terminals. At the same time a massive freight war began, accompanied by the purchase of the small companies. The primary goal at this stage was pushing out the small, relatively inefficient

companies. Inevitably these once-protected small firms were pushed to the wall. Unable to compete with the giants, their profits fell. Increasingly, the remaining non-major operators were pushed into the least profitable sector of the industry, the full-container loads.

If the smaller companies foundered, the giants managed to increase their profits despite the lower rates. But as is natural under capitalism, they pressed for union concessions anyway, in order to minimize their costs in preparation for the battles between the giants at the next stage. Deals with the union, pacifying the IBT leadership became secondary. They were no longer sufficient to assure profits.

The result was that the trucking companies joined the rest of US capital's offensive against labor, by launching a ferocious attack on teamsters. This attack came in the name of the companies' need for "relief." As in the case of the Chrysler corporation, workers were asked to provide that "relief."

On the whole, the offensive has been successful. The most dramatic example of this success is the fact that whereas the National Master Freight Agreement (NMFA) in 1976 covered 400,000 teamsters, today it covers about 250,000. This massive decline in jobs has been accompanied by equally massive, deliberate violations of the NMFA resulting in drastic cuts in wages and worsened working conditions (often imposed with the explicit agreement of local union bosses).

### Forms of Relief:

1) Unilateral cancellation of COLA. The NMFA agreement called for a COLA increase in April of 1981. At least 50 large trucking firms simply refused to pay the increase, and got away with it.

2) Breaking the wage scale. In 1978 the steelhaulers were exceptional among teamsters in that they struck for their contract (against the wishes of the leadership), and won. But within weeks, the companies were violating the agreement, savagely cutting rates on a take-it-or-leave-it basis.

3) Pay Cuts. Not content with refusing to pay increases which are due, the corporations introduced unique ways of cutting wages. The most dramatic has been widespread demands by companies that workers agree (as in-

## Against the Current

dividuals) to deductions from their wages in the form of "loans" to the company, ranging from 7% to 21% of their pay. These loans would be repaid if and when the companies reached a degree of profitability which has seldom been reached even in the best of times. Teamsters were warned that refusal to volunteer would result in closing down operations. (And in exceptional cases, when workers did refuse, companies began to carry out their threats.)

(4) Flight to non-union shops: Of the 150,000 union jobs lost, at least half have been the result of unionized companies' anti-union gimmicks, such as: (a) creating subsidiary companies which are non-union—a practice called "double-breasting," (b) sub-contracting work out to other non-union firms, (c) transferring entire operations to non-union leasing firms, and (d) successful union decertification campaigns.

(5) Casual labor replacing regulars. The companies have been replacing regulars with part-time workers and casuals hired by the day. These workers, who are totally dependent on the boss for rehiring, are easily forced into speed-up and other forms of intensified (and job-eliminating) labor. "Move more tons per hour, or you won't be called back tomorrow." These new productivity norms can then be more easily imposed on the remaining regulars.

(6) Flexible work week and work day. Under the present contract, weekend work carries premium pay. The companies are pressing for, and succeeding in imposing, a flexible work week, so that truckers are forced to work weekends at regular pay. Similarly, instead of fixed hours of work, teamsters are being forced to work off-hours—those hours when the company needs them, and as many as the company needs. So thousands of teamsters are forced to be on-call, waiting by the phone, to report to work at the company's convenience, and at the company's demand.

### THE RANKS' RESPONSE

The companies' demands for concessions are keyed to the old refrain that the decline in jobs was due to excessive labor costs and that only by granting relief, self-imposed worker austerity, can profitability be restored and jobs be saved. In a period such as the present, of little fight back and little confidence in the union, teamsters, (and not teamsters alone), are extremely susceptible to this line of argument. A common worker perception is that "you can't expect me to put 'my company' out of business." Resistance is therefore often minimal and restricted to a minority. As a result, when the loans-to-the-company campaign began, fully 90% of the workers signed up, in the hope it would save their jobs.

This attitude toward give-backs is further shaped by two special considerations. One of these is the fact that unlike the auto and steel corporations, the trucking companies can not claim competition from "cheap foreign labor" as a source of their problems. This can be a persuasive argument to many workers, since US workers feel that they can't do anything about changing the wage pattern abroad. But it is a different story at home. Here companies are trying to force US teamsters to compete against other US workers by wage cutting. Therefore, resistance could seem more "practical" than at US Steel or the electronics industry.

But if resistance should be easier in trucking because of the absence of the bogey-man "foreign competition," there is another factor which makes teamster resistance

more difficult than in steel or auto. This is the fact that, unlike the hard-hit steel and auto industries, the trucking industry is far less unionized, and is growing increasingly less unionized. The weight of this unorganized mass is just as weakening for teamsters as the "foreign cheap labor" competition is for auto and steel workers. It is hard to tell steel workers to "fight to raise Korean or Taiwanese wages," because that seems so unattainable. But it is certainly easier for teamsters to see that organizing the unorganized truckers is possible and that it would help resist relief in the organized part of the industry. Consequently, a major part of any effort to resist relief would have to be a campaign to organize the unorganized.

### WHY NOT "RELIEF?"

A major task of militants in the union must be to provide answers to the questions: why not relief, and how to fight it. Even the minority whose inclinations are to resist granting relief need answers and *alternatives* in order to strengthen their resolve, to make it easier to resist the feeling of being isolated from the more conservative majority, and to struggle with them.

In another period, one in which the class is on the offensive, contemptuous of its enemy, there may be less need for such explicit awareness. In those times, worker militants intuitively see that "relief" is no answer and will not save jobs. But in today's period, arguments are an indispensable weapon.

•1) Under capitalism, the companies take what they can get. There is no such thing as stopping when you have "enough." Once the union or the workers begin to "give-back," the companies understand and see it as a sign of weakness. As a result they will cease to observe even those rights which the workers have *not* given back (just as they are today refusing to pay the COLA). Furthermore, they will begin to demand more "relief" without limits. And without asking the union either. So union weakness and give-backs have not and will not *stop* the tendency to casuals and part-timers. It will only increase that tendency.

2) That "relief" does not create jobs is demonstrated first by the evident effect of Reagan's policies on jobs. He has given US industry tens of billions in tax concessions and handouts. But this strategy has not resulted in more jobs, just a deeper recession.

3) In a period of recession, wage cuts in one company may help that one company against another, but it will not result in a net increase in work—only less work for the other, competing, higher-wage company. It means one worker may get a job at the expense of another. That is in no sense a "solution."

Would it be any different if all teamsters took a wage cut? No. Even such a cut would not reverse the decline in jobs. As in steel and auto, give backs may raise profits, without creating jobs. From where would the jobs come? From cutting into the railroads? The answer is "no." Conceivably, if the truckers got a huge wage cut, the industry could cut its rates so far that it *might* take away business from other means of transport—buses, U-haul, the railroads. But putting railroad workers out of work instead of teamsters is hardly a solution, even if the railroads *could* be further squeezed (which is dubious). And, the railroads and railroad unions would probably "respond" by cutting rail wages in order to "compete." We'd be back where we started from.

4) Even a generalized wage cut in all industries during



a recession only makes for fewer jobs, not more of them. Lower wages means less purchasing power for workers, and therefore the recession is intensified, resulting in fewer teamster jobs, not more. Furthermore, in a recession, even increased profits do *not* get invested in new job-creating facilities. The companies sit on their money waiting for better days. What is necessary for capitalist revival (and more jobs) is the demise of large numbers of old, inefficient companies (and their workers). When these are put out of business, it raises the long-term profit prospects for the rest of the companies, and then, perhaps, an economic revival occurs.

5) Concessions and relief are really an old story in the IBT. Local union bureaucrats anxious to expand their locals (and get a little more "on the side"), do not hesitate to offer deals to companies which have contracts with other IBT locals. Such give-backs are good for the officials and the companies. But they do not produce a single job—only a transfer of jobs from one group of workers in one local to another group of workers. This war between union bureaucrats becomes legitimized, and therefore intensified, when a climate of relief becomes dominant and generalized in a union, as it threatens to do today. No increase in jobs happens here as a result of relief.

6) Relief violates a major goal of unionism which is to *prevent* competition among workers. Granting relief to a company does the opposite. It puts workers from one firm in competition with those from another.

7) Perhaps the most important reason to resist relief is that acquiescence in granting relief strengthens worker's identification with and dependence on the company as opposed to the union. This change in attitude, like the give-backs themselves, further encourages companies to seek even more give-backs, and at the same time reduces the union's ability to resist when and if it chooses to do so.

8) How about the two-tiered wage system, suggested by Roy Williams? Under this plan big companies would be asked to pay higher wages than the smaller ones, thus helping the latter who presumably need it most. Naturally, the giants of the industry oppose this plan since it could shift profits and jobs away from them to the smaller outfits. (It would not however result in *more* jobs.) They also oppose the two-tiered wage plan because it would slow down their ability to crush the small operators, or to buy them out. But this wage proposal is not in the interests of the drivers either. It will produce not more jobs, but disunity amongst the workers in the industry. And, once low wages exist in one part of the industry, it is inevitable that these low wages will spread. Thus, the entire wage structure would fall.

## TEAMSTER OFFICIALDOM'S RESPONSE

The crisis in the industry has had a second "normalizing" effect on the industry. As among workers in other industries in this period, there is a powerful tendency among both leaders and ranks to accept concessions to the corporations as unavoidable. The move for give-backs, to "relief," has spread like a prairie fire throughout the labor movement.

The teamster union's response has been in two stages. Until very recently, the IBT leaders turned a deaf ear to worker protests and allowed the companies to do as they wished, or at best, to renegotiate the contract on the local level. For example, in the case of the forced loans, Roy Williams actually approved the company plans in ad-

vance. A year ago, the companies attempted to formalize and intensify their offensive by demanding the renegotiation of the NMFA. Then-president Fitzsimmons refused, referring the companies back to the locals.

Now the erosion has gone so far that even the union has become alarmed. When the companies once again asked for renegotiation of the contract (which does not expire until April '82), the new IBT President, Roy Williams, agreed in the hope that he might be able to stabilize or slow down the rout. But however much he may wish to do so, it is unlikely, to say the least, that he will be willing to do what is necessary (for a start, to mobilize the ranks) to accomplish even this modest goal. The prospect is therefore for even greater deterioration of conditions and even fewer jobs.

## IS RESISTANCE POSSIBLE? TDU'S RESPONSE.

Teamsters are faced with a difficult situation, particularly if solutions are limited to one company or one industry. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that, in general, teamsters see little chance of a successful fight-back for two reasons. First, they recognize that the union has no intentions of leading any fight. On the contrary, the union has been leading the fight for "relief." Secondly, truckers often believe that there is no alternative but to give "relief." Despite all the evidence to the contrary, many workers still believe that give-backs will save jobs.

Pro-relief sentiments surfaced even at the TDU convention. But TDU resisted this trend and refused to endorse relief as a way of saving jobs. They were helped in this process—helped to show that resistance was possible—by a dramatic experience at the Jones Motor Co., to which we now turn.

Jones Motor was an early innovator in the "voluntary" (forced) loans plan. Under the threat of barn closures, workers were induced to agree to a 15% pay deduction. They were however assured, and expected, that *all* employees would contribute. In fact that turned out *not* to be the case. An aggressive minority in several of the company's barns refused. When an actual majority in the Pittsburgh barn refused, the barn was closed. But as the minority rebellion manifested itself elsewhere, many workers who had agreed to the loan began to reverse themselves, and in the name of "all or none," demanded an annulment of the "loans."

At first, the IBT leadership went along with the company, "individual decisions are none of our business." Indeed, the company had consulted with Roy Williams and gotten his OK before starting its plan. But the pending reopening of negotiations and the ranks' pressure compelled the union to reverse itself in this particular case on the ground that there was no guarantee of repayment. The company has for the moment retreated, blaming an "irresponsible minority" of teamsters, and uttering threats to leave the NMFA.

Clearly, a "relief" policy can be defeated, and TDU's final contract proposals, adopted at the convention, came out against relief, period. The *exchange* offer of relief-for-jobs as a *contractual demand* (proposed by some) was not approved (though the demand for job security was, of course, pressed hard). To have *advocated exchange in the contract* would have, in effect, compromised, if not surrendered in advance any fight against relief.\* (See footnote at end of article)

## Against the Current

What the Jones Motor experience points to is not just that one can beat "relief," but that the key to doing so is addressing the minority who oppose relief, and who, if politically armed and organized, can, at times, pull even a reluctant majority in its wake. But in order to address this minority, it helps if one can give it weapons (or encourage it to use weapons it already has) with which to resist relief, run-away shops and other effects of the restructuring taking place in the trucking industry—strategies and alternatives to combat the widespread defeatism amongst workers today.

### RESISTING RELIEF

1) TDU is focusing, initially and primarily on that minority which can be mobilized against granting relief. The convention tried to meet this responsibility by launching a petition campaign against relief; promising to publish a pamphlet on why relief does *not* generate jobs; and actively using the grievance procedure to resist relief demands. No one thinks that these actions are enough to beat relief. Clearly, in one way or another, the IBT will continue to grant relief.

2) Equally essential, any fightback against relief desperately requires the right to strike—a right which was lost in the 1976 contract and which is hardly likely to be restored in the current negotiations. (Previously, the contract assured locals of their right to strike, and gave stewards the right to initiate 24-hour job actions.) It was therefore puzzling that attempts to raise this issue, by reiterating TDU support for the right of teamsters to strike *despite contract prohibitions*, were resisted by the TDU leadership, as "irrelevant."

Of course, passing such a resolution will not make it happen, anymore than the rest of the TDU program is likely to go anywhere at this point in time. But if one is interested in addressing the important militant minority (not it alone of course), then the right to strike is an issue one can never tire of discussing, even if only educationally—a limitation which, unfortunately, applies to most of what TDU does at this stage.

3) A similar, modest attempt was also made to introduce into the convention the notion that direct action can be successful, if the members are conscious of the need to engage in tactics such as sympathy strikes and secondary boycotts (the one tactic which was used to such dramatic effect by the teamsters when the union was in the process of becoming a mass organization in the 1930s). Indeed, even Lane Kirkland was forced to announce, at the Nov. AFL-CIO convention, that the prohibition of the secondary boycott was the largest single obstacle to labor organizing. A simple proposal that the TDU newspaper should carry articles on the use of secondary boycotts in organizing the unorganized, as well as in winning job actions, was also rejected as "irrelevant."

Yet keeping in mind the growing non-union character of the industry, this "irrelevant" tactic of secondary boycotts, openly proclaimed, would be an enormous help in accomplishing that urgent teamster need—organizing the unorganized. By showing these unorganized that the entire union is ready to back them up, the union would simultaneously be strengthened in its ability to resist relief in the *organized* sector of the industry.

This is not to suggest that the leadership of TDU is opposed to the right to strike or to secondary boycotts. But their focus on conservative secondary reform officials in the IBT (see below) leads them to push such issues into

the background even in an educational way.

Indeed success in the battle against relief depends on more than strategies for direct resistance. Two other aspects of the struggle have to be clearly perceived and assessed. They are, the role of reform officials in the union, and the role of broader, essentially political issues on which TDU's success ultimately depends.

4) *The Camarata Amendment*: The attitude of TDU to reform officials in the IBT has been a matter of contention for some time. (For details on this debate see ATC, Fall, 1980). The issue came to a head once again as a result of events at the last IBT convention in Las Vegas. TDU came to that convention with several dozen delegates pledged to it. Perhaps half of them were full-time officials elected as TDUs. But despite being TDU members, all these officials (except the Canadians) totally distanced themselves from TDU at the convention. They neither spoke for TDU, voted for it, nor in any other way supported its proposals.

To combat these opportunists, Pete Camarata, a national co-chair and founder of TDU, put forward a motion that officials who run with TDU support should sign a statement saying they would stick by its program, and if they failed to do so, their reneging should be reported in TDU's newspaper. This proposal was bitterly opposed by the national TDU organizer, Ken Paff, and the leadership of TDU.

Camarata argued that these officials discredit TDU; that TDU has studiously avoided informing its members of the fact that many opportunists use TDU and then abandon it and its program once in office; that telling the truth about such officials will not just teach teamsters the dangers of relying on officials in elections, but will raise TDU's prestige and its reputation for integrity—TDU's most important asset; and lastly, union accountability is a necessary principle in governing relations between the ranks and the leadership.

Taking the other side, Ken Paff argued that asking the official to sign a statement that he would stick to the TDU program constituted a loyalty oath; that it would have the opposite effect to that intended (presumably keep these people from seeking TDU out in the first place); that we should respect local autonomy and let the local make a critical statement if it thought it necessary. Indeed, he said, the International Steering Committee (ISC) cannot be the judge, nor know enough to judge; and therefore, to win our goals we need allies and a broad range of people down the road, including even heads of district councils. Furthermore, these reneging officials must be seen as teamsters who went at least half of the way with us. Why attack them for not going all the way? Don't single them out. Leave it to the local's judgement.

Rita Drapkin, a TDU leader from Pittsburgh, argued in support of Paff. She asserted that Convoy had no space; there was little national interest in *local* officials who reneged; it was difficult to tell if and when officials actually violated their commitments; and lastly, local chapters were often divided on such issues.

Jerry Bliss, sec'y-treas. of Local 337 argued that one had to understand how hard it is to stand up for principle once in office; the reneging may be more apparent than real; once the top IBT leaders are gone, then these reform elements will be O.K.

Camarata's motion was defeated overwhelmingly by about 4 to 1.

5) *TDU AND POLITICS*: If resistance to relief is difficult,



it is doubly difficult to resist the loss of jobs or relief for steel and auto haulers, if the steel and car industries are cutting back production. It is equally difficult to defend against relief if Blacks and women remain discriminated against. (That lesson was brought home painfully when the important 1978 West Coast grocery strike was lost, in part because unemployed Blacks were pressured into scabbing.) And it is terribly difficult to resist the devastation which the politicians imposed upon the teamsters when Kennedy and the others imposed deregulation on the industry, if teamsters have not assimilated the notion that politics and political action are an inseparable part of every struggle, including resistance to relief.

That is why the TDU leadership's reaction to a resolution favoring a Labor Party was so unfortunate. Supporters of the resolution argued that many problems facing the union could not be solved on a union level, but needed political solutions; that the two major parties had betrayed the labor movement and the IBT repeatedly. A representative of the ISC argued in opposition that TDU was set up for union democracy and to help fight employers; that a labor party position would destroy TDU; and that politics is a private matter. The resolution lost by about 10-1, a ratio similar to that of previous years.

While one can be dubious about the charge that a labor party position would destroy TDU, it is certainly the case that the conservative, white males who dominate TDU (about a dozen blacks were in attendance), need a lot of convincing on the subject. But there is evidence that what many members resist is not so much discussing the question as being put up against the wall on the subject. It might therefore be wiser to raise the issue in a more pedagogic way—perhaps without any resolutions, but just to ask for discussion of the subject—a workshop at the convention for those interested, and perhaps the right to present that point of view in Convoy as a discussion article.

## CONCLUSION:

The ISC position on the labor party reflected a larger failing. This was a sample of its refusal to recognize the need for new strategies and solutions to problems facing the teamsters in an age of such radical restructuring of the American labor force and American industry: the electronic revolution; the rise of the pink collar workers; etc. Without a willingness to even look at, much less search for, new alternatives, TDU will be fighting with one hand tied behind its back, and militancy itself could become a casualty. For if militancy is necessary to convert abstract solutions into realities, the militancy itself may not arise in the absence of "solutions."

A footnote before closing. TDU is a democratic organization. But to say so is not to suggest that there may not be other tendencies as well. The Camarata amendment was given 2 speakers for, and two against, plus 15 minutes of discussion by the ISC. But two other amendments were also under consideration. For these amendments which the ISC unanimously opposed, the ISC proposed, one speaker for, one against, to be followed by a vote. When members objected to this patent discrimination, the chairman, Camarata, permitted discussion to continue after the initial pro & con speaker.

After six conventions, TDU remains alive and kicking. It is difficult to say with certainty that it is growing but survival alone is noteworthy. There is considerable turnover on every level. Chapters come into existence, and

die. The ISC composition lacks stability. Perhaps half of all its members are not only new each year, but often new to TDU itself. Nevertheless, through it all, a cadre has come into existence, with some living roots in the union. It is a cadre which, like many in this period is overly fearful and responsive to its conservative milieu, but has not capitulated to it.

## Postscript: IBT SURRENDERS

*As we went to press, we learned some of the terms of the renegotiated contract. They give relief in spades. First, trucking companies are given the right to compel over-the-road drivers to pick up freight from individual shippers in one city and then to deliver it directly to the multiple-customers in another city, instead of to the barns. It is estimated that this clause can result in a 20% loss of jobs for intra-city freight drivers. Second, the drivers of full-trailer loads (a single load from one shipper) are exempted from the NMFA agreement. This means a substantial cut in pay for these drivers.*

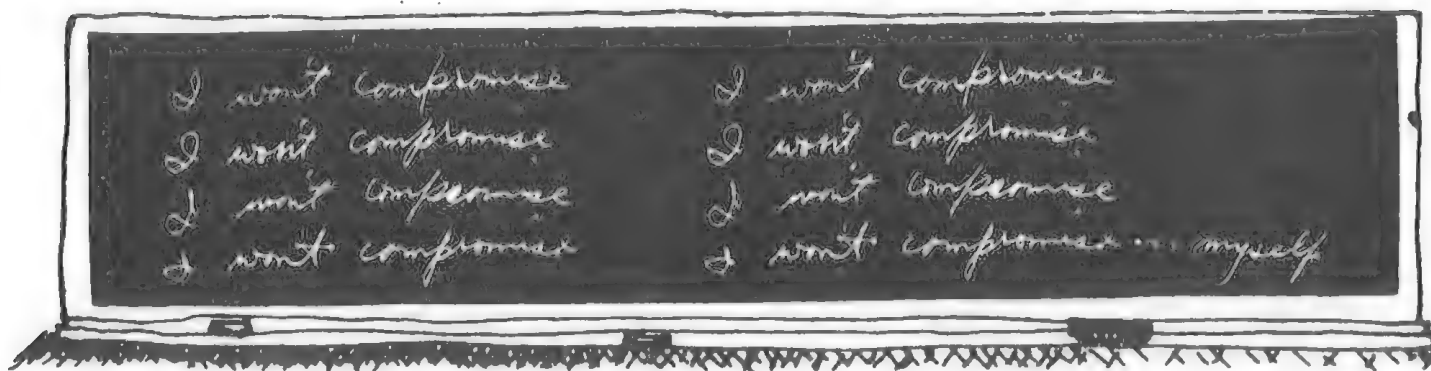
\*A Tactical Variant: Of course, defeat of relief is not inevitable—far from it in the IBT today, given the still powerful grip of the union machine and the ideological conservatism which, together, make relief appear to be unavoidable and even reasonable and justifiable. Consequently, when the minority has exhausted its efforts to resist relief, it may be desirable to then introduce a second line of defense, a proposal to the ranks: "well, if you feel you must give relief, then why don't we at least try to get something back for it, something substantial, say, a guarantee of existing jobs."

But however necessary such a step might be, this fall-back solution is not as simple or promising as it might appear, for two reasons. First, if the exchange of company give-backs for worker relief is not a substantial one (and can it be substantial in a period of crisis for the industry with a leadership such as the IBT's?), then we will be giving up our fight against relief for a mess of pottage. Secondly, however, the proposed exchange may be substantial, such as relief in exchange for job security. In that case, two other difficulties arise. For one, many workers who are for relief will see, recognize this kind of exchange for what it really is, a backhand way of opposing relief—a proposal whose net effect, would be to defeat relief. For workers who accept the necessity of relief (accept that is the dependence of jobs on profits), this proposed exchange will appear as a non-solution, even if it "exposes" the employers unfairness, in being unwilling to "give back" anything to his employees.

If however, the exchange of relief for job security is taken seriously, as winnable, then it should be clear that winning such a fight will be no less difficult to organize around than winning the fight against relief itself.

A case in point is the Philadelphia teachers strike last October. The teachers union was prepared to grant relief to a bankrupt school board by not insisting upon a scheduled 10% pay raise (a COLA in effect). IF, in exchange the Board would guarantee job security. But the Board rejected such an "exchange" and insisted on laying off 15% of the staff (3500 teachers). Without that cut there would not be the relief the Board needed. The union succeeded at least temporarily, in imposing its exchange of a salary increase for job security upon a reluctant Board and City, but only through a 55-day strike and with the aid of a central labor council threat of a general strike.

NEVERTHELESS, it cannot be denied that there are cases in which exposing the employers unfairness (his insistence on only one-way give-backs is just one example) can evoke a *fight-back*. An important peculiarity of the contemporary labor scene, one which has been especially evident among unionized public employees, is the reaction to outrageous give-backs. When the employer loses his feel of things and makes demands for give-backs which workers feel to be "unreasonable," unjustifiable and rapacious, then defensive strikes against give-backs can and do break out.



# ON BEING A UNION OFFICIAL

By Stan Heller

On January 31st of last year I resigned my position as full time elected Vice President for Publicity and Publications of the Connecticut State Federation of Teachers (CSFT). I didn't go quietly. I sent a long letter out to nearly a hundred local leaders blasting CSFT leadership for lack of militancy and for sabotaging the bold policies and programs which had been officially adopted by the CSFT (often at my urging).

Some may feel that I squandered a golden opportunity. In many ways my position with the union was ideal for a socialist. I was manager and chief writer of a bi-monthly newspaper sent out to each of our 13,000 members. I wrote most of our press releases, internal newsletters, flyers and leaflets. In addition, I was chief lobbyist for the union in the state legislature and I was in charge of the day to day operations of our political education activities.

And yet, I had no choice but to resign. If my reasons were peculiar to my union and my circumstances, there would be little point to this report. But I think my experiences have some general meaning for radicals in the labor movement, particularly for those considering full-time union jobs.

## Taking My First Steps

Before talking about my political history in the CSFT you have to know a little about its parent body, the American Federation of Teachers. The AFT has been dominated for almost a decade by right wing social democratic leadership. It downplays strikes and emphasizes electoral activity as the road to teacher power. It has become completely insensitive on racial and ethnic questions, enthusiastically supportive of unlimited military expenditures, and active in promoting anti-left unionism in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

It would obviously be out of the question for a radical to join the staff of an AFT affiliate if he had to administer those kinds of politics. However, the structure and the traditions of the AFT allow locals and state bodies to function almost any way they please. Over the last decade leaders of the Connecticut AFT generally had cool relations with the national leadership and little involvement with national issues.

I'd been elected delegate to the state federation Executive Council in 1971, but most of my union work in the early '70s was within my local. I became president of the local in 1973, a position I held for seven years. Our local represented 500 public school teachers.

My serious involvement with the CSFT began in 1977 when I became involved in a movement to remove the CSFT President, Ronald O'Brien, an authoritarian, bureaucratic figure. I was elected chairperson of a caucus set up primarily for that purpose, the Union Solidarity Caucus.

## Right vs. Left in the Caucus

Some of the caucus was just anti-O'Brien, but most members wanted to establish a platform and work to alter the political direction of our union. Besides myself there were a small number of conscious socialists in the caucus and we pushed for far-reaching positions. We got the caucus to adopt a radical school finance plan that called for a totally state funded system of elementary and secondary education based on very progressive income and wealth taxes. We successfully pushed the caucus to advocate a drastic reduction in the number of political endorsements made by the union.

Our caucus made slow but steady progress and we began to expand. Many of our positions were adopted as CSFT policy. In the spring of 1978 a Convention of the CSFT adopted our constitutional amendment which provided a way to recall officers. O'Brien saw the handwriting on the wall and lined-up a staff job with the Pennsylvania Federation of Teachers. He then resigned as CSFT President.

As our caucus grew it had naturally attracted some who were more interested in our strength than in our program. One of those was the union's Executive Vice President. In the caucus she led the opposition to the



proposals of the left. When O'Brien left, she was chosen to fill out his unexpired term with the understanding that she would back the President of the New Britain local, George Springer, for CSFT President at the next regular election. In the meantime, Springer was elected to her now open position of Executive Vice President.

About the same time the Vice President for Political Action resigned and we elected a caucus member (a member of DSOC) in his stead. Our other major successes were getting the union to adopt our school finance plan and many of our stands on political endorsements. Our motion for "no endorsement" for governor won out over a motion to endorse Ella Grasso for re-election. We also got a resolution passed to limit CSFT endorsements to those candidates who were "aggressively pro-labor".

As the 1979 union election approached we fielded a full slate to challenge the old guard. I ran for the position of Vice-President for Publicity and Publications. (At that time it was not a full-time position.) Our prospects seemed excellent. However, as our popularity increased in the union, unity within the caucus was falling apart. Increasingly most of the CSFT officers who were caucus members would ignore caucus positions and vote their own way. The CSFT President and George Springer, the person we were grooming for the presidency, actively opposed the caucus no-endorsement policy in the 1978 gubernatorial race. Springer and our Vice-President for Political Action took no action as the V.P. for Legislation ignored the union's new school finance policy. They also did nothing to implement the caucus motion to send buses of teachers to the capital to fight passage of a compulsory binding arbitration law for teachers.

As the election neared, disputes about whether caucus members were carrying out policy became a chronic part of each meeting. It became clear that the caucus was rent by fundamental political differences. The question was, should those of us on the left pull out of the caucus? For a number of reasons (rationalizations?) we didn't. The main one was that we felt the first priority was to get rid of the remnants of the O'Brien administration. We also believed that Executive Council delegates and rank and file members wouldn't be able to understand the reasons for a split. Finally, for reasons more personal than political the number of those in the left of the caucus had dwindled. So, after each intra-caucus battle, we patched up things as best we could.

## Once in Office

Though almost the entire caucus slate was victorious in the spring election, election day was the last gasp of the Union Solidarity Caucus. Tactically everyone understood that the USC could no longer be a caucus but only another forum for argument. After election day the caucus never met again.

I've gone through this long history of the caucus to show the political currents flowing within the union. My decision to take a full time job with the union was based on my feeling that enough of these currents were moving leftward to give me a base of support.

As V.P. for Publicity and Publications my main duty was to manage and write for the union paper, which appeared five times a year. I felt the best contribution I

could make would be to transform the paper into a forum for discussing basic union strategy.

The paper printed many critical analyses of compulsory binding arbitration. It dealt frequently with school finance and tax reform. It presented detailed descriptions of our legislative program and in-depth evaluation of how politicians voted on our bills. There was a regular column on labor history. Articles appeared on nationalization of the oil industry and on the idea of a U.S. labor party.

One of the last things the Union Solidarity Caucus had done was to get the union to create a full-time staff job to do lobbying in the state legislature and political work around election time. The main impetus was the union's inability to prevent passage in 1979 of the compulsory binding arbitration law. The law mandated binding arbitration of contracts in their entirety, not just of grievances. This law was the government's "alternative" to any "right to strike" law.

I began thinking about applying for the position myself. I thought it would be a way to see if a militant political action strategy could be devised as an alternative to the AFL-CIO lesser-of-two-evils crap.

The Executive Council went along with my plan and in February 1980 I took a year's union-leave-of-absence from my teaching job.

As legislative advocate of the union most of what I did was straight lobbying, testifying at hearings and talking one on one with legislators. Our legislative program had been set about a month earlier. Our main goal was to prevent a compulsory binding arbitration law (similar to the one already imposed on teachers) from being imposed on state employees. Besides that we wanted to do some work on raising the right to strike issue (all public employee strikes are illegal in Connecticut) and on publicizing our full state funding of education plan.

## Equality in Education

For me, the high point of our legislative efforts was the release of our school finance plan. Connecticut had been under a court order for years to equalize its towns' abilities to pay for education but made little progress in that direction.

The CSFT proposed to move toward true Equality in Education by taking school finance out of local hands and making it totally a state responsibility. Initially every town in the state would get the same funds per pupil. Eventually, towns whose students had greater needs would get additional funding.

The income side of our plan was equally drastic. For individuals or families earning over \$23,000 we proposed two new taxes, a steeply progressive income tax and a property tax on the value of stocks, bonds and bank accounts. These taxes would pay completely for our full-state-funding-of-education plan, allow sharp cuts in Connecticut's sales tax (the highest in the nation), and cut local property taxes 60%.

We received a surprising amount of media coverage for the plan. We did an hour radio talk show on the plan and an hour on public TV. Needless to say the plan went nowhere in the legislature. The liberals on the finance committee had decided that their strategy for the year was to go along with increases in regressive taxes so that the public "would get angry and be more receptive to an income tax".

## Against the Current

More interesting was the effect of the plan on our own union. A number of members read press accounts that the CSFT wanted an "income tax" and felt threatened. There were a good number of complaints to CSFT leaders.

I realized I had erred in blazing away on this path without doing enough education among our members. Afterward I put together some leaflets and an audio-visual presentation on the plan. When members saw the whole plan and had it fully explained they became generally very supportive. *Their main criticism was that the taxes should be even more progressive.*

### Trouble Sets In

What I only vaguely noticed at the time, though, was that some CSFT officers reacted to the members' complaints by beginning to dismiss the whole school funding plan as "wild" and "idealistic". They began quietly to look for more "practical positions". Now in one sense they were right. It was inconceivable that the legislature would set up a system of complete education equality funded by taxes on the upper classes.

Yet the main purpose in raising the plan was not to seek its enactment, but to use it as a forum to agitate on the issues of school finance and taxation. Most working people, teachers among them, believe the capitalist logic that funding for schools can't pick up until times get more prosperous and the commercial and industrial base of their city grows. They buy the argument that any increase in public service budgets will have to come out of their own pockets. They're convinced that "tax reform" is just a euphemism for new taxes on working people.

Our school finance and tax plan explodes that logic. It reveals that opposition to equal educational opportunity is not a hard-headed economic necessity, but a cold-blooded defense of upper class privilege. By driving that lesson home we might well change a lot of passivity and defeatism into anger and energy.

I stated that argument many times and the officers would nod their heads in agreement. However, I began to get the feeling that they would be willing to let me run with this radical finance plan only as long as liberal legislators had no "improvements" of their own.

The problem was that making strong demands and organizing workers to support them was not at all the way labor operated politically in Connecticut. Legislative benefits were gained through deals between labor officials and the Democratic Party. The labor officials had certain assets: money, campaign workers and some influence over their members' votes. These would be delivered to the Democrats in exchange for the privilege of picking five or six pieces of legislation that would be automatically passed. It was well understood that labor would be reasonable in its requests and recognize the prevailing political climate. An improvement in workers' compensation benefits, a minor change in a public employee bargaining law, a safety regulation — those were "reasonable" requests. Bills to change the tax structure, to control runaway shops, or to legalize public employee strikes were not.

The new CSFT officers were much more comfortable with that method of operation than the one I was proposing. They would go along with a tough sounding program, but when practical decisions had to be made, they would opt for "realism" rather than "idealism".

### Anti-Strike Laws?

A case in point was on a collective bargaining bill for state employees. The original bill would have given state employee unions the power to choose between the power to strike and binding arbitration. It emerged from committee, however, as a compulsory arbitration bill. To make things even worse, the bill would make the arbitrator's decision binding on the union but only advisory on the legislature!

The CSFT totally opposed any kind of mandatory binding arbitration. But we were approached by a number of state employee unions and associations and asked to join a coalition that would work to amend the bill back into its original form. Supposedly if it couldn't get what it wanted the coalition would work to kill the bill. The coalition was suspect. It was well known that most of its constituent groups would be perfectly happy with a pure binding arbitration bill. I argued that any right to strike option was now dead and that our participation in the coalition would eventually entangle us in support for binding arbitration.

President Springer sharply disagreed with me. He insisted that "We must not become isolated. We need allies. CSFT positions are our goals, but we have to be willing to bend if we expect to work with other groups".

The consequences of this policy quickly surfaced. The CSFT joined the coalition. Before long, the coalition agreed to support passage of an amendment that would have put state employees under a weak form of binding arbitration with no strike option at all. Springer went along with it! But the Democratic leadership would accept no significant amendments to the bill at all. The coalition, which had agreed that under these circumstances it would work to defeat the bill, just fell apart. As it turned out, only our union and 1199 fought the bill and helped bring its eventual demise: (Ironically, the state bureaucracy helped. They opposed the bill for their own right-wing reasons.)

As the legislative session ended, my contract with the union was nearing its end. I decided to propose that I be hired on permanently. That was agreed upon with the proviso that the whole question of my being both an officer and staff member would have to be worked out before the next election.

### Staying Left—From Above

I knew there was a huge difference between my political ideas and the bulk of the state union's leadership, but I worked out a rationale. I would argue and organize for a radical approach to politics and legislation. If the CSFT adopted it, all to the good. If the union took more conservative positions, I would faithfully carry them out, but at the same time work within the union to have them changed.

Some friends advised me that I was crazy to think that my radicalism would be tolerated by what was at best a moderate social democratic leadership. I disagreed. I thought the union respected the effective job I was doing. I also thought I could build a new grouping or caucus on the left with which the leadership would have to cooperate.

Rebuilding the left proved easier to say than to do.

The binding arbitration law successfully imposed on teachers had a very conservative effect on the union. The union was opposed in principle to binding arbitra-



tion, but in practice almost all its local units were afraid of defying it. So, long before the old contracts expired, new terms were set by the respective negotiating teams or dictated by an arbitrator. Union meetings, agitation, picket lines and strike threats were all irrelevant to the process. This could not but help dampen the CSFT's militancy in general.

The socialist left, in the persons of individual members of the Executive Council, had dwindled to almost nothing. It would be very difficult to find new recruits. I believed there had to be a left caucus, but I didn't go out of my way to go back to the rank and file to develop one. My actual practice was to work informally with the most left of the CSFT officers to push for strong reform programs and for more independent political action.

This seemed promising for a while. I was able to get the union to adopt a radical tax reform position and to submit it to the state AFL-CIO convention. In September I took the lead in getting the union to vote adoption of a new political action strategy: It encompassed four aspects: a) sharply limiting the number of CSFT endorsements, b) broad education of our members on political issues, c) picketing and demonstrations to exert legislative pressure and d) support for independent candidacies. Very few endorsements were given out in races for state office. Motions to support even the liberal section of the legislature's leadership were defeated. The union did vote to endorse Carter at the meeting, but it seemed that on the whole a real step forward had been taken on the road to breaking with the Democrats.

Looking back, the September meeting was the high water mark for leftist ideas in the CSFT. The next month the V.P. for Political Action led a charge to reconsider our endorsements. He and the President of our largest local alarmed delegates with warnings that top Democrats would take retribution against us if we denied them endorsements. In a close vote delegates reversed themselves and voted backing of a whole section of Democratic leadership.

## The Final Test

I was pretty well bummed out by this flip-flop. I started to have real doubts about staying on the job. Three incidents occurred in the next month that finally convinced me that I had to publicly break with the CSFT leadership by resigning my CSFT posts.

The first concerned the President's activities on a legislative advisory panel on school finance. He said not a word about our own school funding plan. To my horror, he even cast the decisive vote to recommend retaining a grant that only benefitted the richest towns in the state!

The second incident occurred at the state AFL-CIO convention. I presented the official CSFT radical tax reform plan only to have other CSFT officers announce that the CSFT "had withdrawn support for its plan" and was now backing the age old AFL-CIO plan.

Finally, over my strong objections, the officers voted to advocate legislation that would make teacher compulsory binding arbitration work more "fairly". Total opposition to forced binding arbitration had been one of our strongest and proudest stands. Yet the officers were now starting down the road to an accommodation with the concept.

I complained violently within the union about these incidents. The response from the President and other officers was that I was overstepping my position, that I was destroying unity, that I was posturing and that I should show solidarity with my fellow officers.

It was clear that my rationale for being a full time officer was full of holes. The notion of "loyal opposition" was unacceptable to Springer and his people. Either I had to follow them or they would oust me. Could I still be re-elected in May? I made an honest assessment of the situation and realized that the vote of support I had received in December was support for a left presence *within the leadership*. That support would evaporate if it was a matter of choosing the left *against the rest of the leadership*.

The prospect of creating new bases of support was very unlikely. In fact as long as I was part of the leadership it would be more difficult to impress upon potential supporters of the left how conservative the CSFT was becoming.

So my only choice was going along or getting out. It wasn't all that easy to decide. But with a little help from my friends I decided to quit my job with the union. I'm back teaching and I feel great about my decision. I attend CSFT Executive Council meetings and raise a lot of issues. But I no longer consider Executive Council politics to be the main focus of my union activities. My main work is to seek out and encourage potential radicals from within the rank and file.

## What Next?

Now to the general lessons I draw from my experiences. The first is that union officials will welcome socialists into their ranks, but only if the socialists leave their politics at the door. The officials want the energy and commitment that socialists typically put into their union work, but they are deeply threatened by socialist ideas.

This goes for union reformers ("progressives") too, even those elected as part of a coalition with the left. The reason is not primarily that "power corrupts", but that there is no viable midpoint between radical unionism and mainstream union practice. There is a wide gulf between those whose activity is focused on the abolition of capitalism, and those whose actions make union progress dependent on collaboration with employers and politicians.

This latter method of operation, business unionism, is most effective when embraced as a whole. Merging it with forms of class struggle will weaken it. For instance, if public employee unions settle contracts by making political deals with politicians, it doesn't make sense for the unions to undermine those politicians by exposing their regressive tax and social policies.

For its part, radical unionism, too, must be embraced as a whole. Radical unionism demands a sharp break with the Democratic Party and an end to collaboration with employers at the expense of other workers. It demands a strategy based on mass mobilization of workers rather than on the expertise of union officials and staff. It demands frank statements that liberal-Keynesian economic reforms are frauds and only socialist reorganization of the economy holds hope for workers.

The honest reformer who becomes a union official would like to continue working with his or her socialist

## Against the Current

allies. But because compromise between business unionism and radical unionism is so difficult and so unstable, the reformer has to make a choice between the two. In the current political context the choice is invariably business unionism.

Thus I had been able to get motions passed for radical reforms, but found most of my fellow officers obstructed their implementation. My own efforts to carry out policy were constantly hindered or undercut. I found myself holding back on a number of political issues for fear of damaging my job security. Nevertheless, I criticized the leadership frequently enough to gain their growing hostility.

The CSFT Executive Council, the 100 member policy-making body of our state union, constantly wavered. One month they would vote a strong position, the next month they would retreat from it. They couldn't be depended on to keep the leadership in line.

A second conclusion I've drawn is that in a union whose officers and rank and file support business unionism, a socialist who becomes a full-time official cannot organize around the really meaningful political questions. To remain in office you have to refrain from speaking your mind on a lot of issues. Consciously or unconsciously you hold back. You do not attack the union bureaucracy. You do not debunk reformism. You do not talk about socialism. You make compromises (all in the name of Mike Harrington's version of progress as the "left wing of the possible").

I know I did. I made no real objections to endorsement of a number of Hubert Humphrey-type liberals running for U.S. Congress. When there was a discussion about possible union purchases of Israel bonds I sat in silence. I seldom raised questions about the right wing positions of our national union. I reasoned that I had to ignore those issues so that I could make progress on smaller issues such as the right to strike, tax reform.

But the compromising isn't worth it. You make progress on the small issues only to give the traditional unionists, right or "left", free reign on all the more fundamental questions. I came to believe that if I stayed on the job, I'd end up as an AFL-CIO clone, "privately sympathetic to socialism".

What is true about elected official positions is doubly true about staff jobs. As the ex-New Left took a turn towards the working class, a number of leftists took staff positions with unions. They hoped by vigorously leading working class struggles workers would be continually radicalized. As far as I can see it hasn't worked out. The best that radicals can do with staff jobs is to perform them with honesty, effectiveness and dedication. It makes for a better union, a more responsive union, a more competent union, but that's all. What they can not do from their position as staff, is organize the ranks for the radical reshaping of the labor movement which is so indispensable if the working class is to effectively respond to the crisis of our time. The union staff is barred from organizing politically within the union either by outright rules or by dependence on approval of higher officials. The union staff can't fight business unionism. It can only carry it out in the most enlightened way.

A number of leftist union staff realize that they can make no contribution to socialism through their staff jobs. They argue that like any other worker they can do

political work after their work day is done. This is true, but union jobs usually have very irregular hours and make great demands on a person's time. All too often the union staffer finds himself/herself unable to fit in any political activities.

The final and most general point is that socialists should take *full time* union jobs only when there is a large base of radicals in their union who will back a struggle along class conscious lines. I don't know of any U.S. union where such a base exists today. It follows that the first task for socialist unionists is to create that base. That involves making socialist analyses, seeking out and encouraging potential radicals, and involving them in struggles against the bosses, the labor bureaucracy, and against social-democratic pipe dreams. Eventually this means the construction of socialist caucuses.

This does not imply that socialists should refuse to join in coalitions with non-radicals who are organizing to reform their union. Socialists should be energetically involved. They should insist, though, that these be real coalitions, groups that band together for a common purpose and leave each constituent group free to advance its own political line. All too often radicals join these coalitions and lose themselves in the reform struggle. Their own basic political goals get put off to the "future".

Socialist consciousness won't develop until workers start hearing about socialism. And no one is going to tell them about it if the socialists don't themselves.

### In Memoriam

Murry Weiss

1915-82

The political history of Murry Weiss, a friend of *Against the Current*, spanned five decades of revolutionary commitment and practice—from the CP to the SWP, to the FSP (of which he was the National Chairperson when he died).

In each of these movements, Murry was a leader noted for his exceptional personal and political qualities.

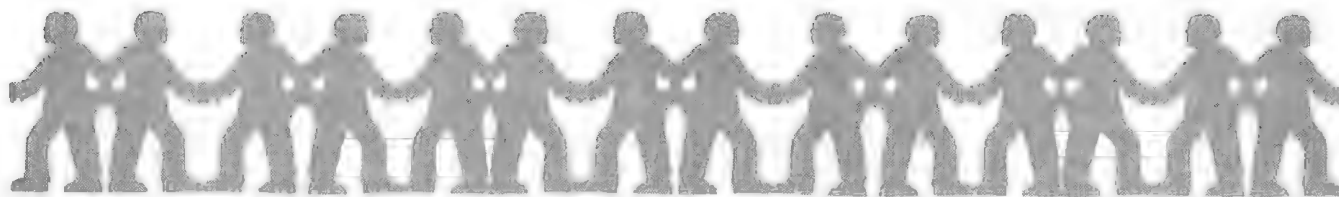
He was that all too rare bird in the left, a caring leader, one open to genuine exchange and dialogue with the ranks of the movement, a teacher who recognized that generating self-confidence and evoking the leadership qualities within every comrade was an important responsibility of leadership itself.

Weiss's own deserved self-confidence expressed itself further in his unusually non-sectarian relationships with those individuals and groups with whom he differed. It was this non-sectarian quality, his readiness to learn from others, which contributed to Weiss's commitment to revolutionary socialist regroupment throughout his political life.

Weiss was also noted for his anticipatory pro-feminist practice within the old left, in a period when equality of women within the left was more honored in the breach than the observance.

The revolutionary movement, and especially we at ATC, will miss him.





# INFORMAL WORK GROUPS: INVISIBLE POWER IN THE WORKPLACE

AN EXCHANGE: BY SAM FRIEDMAN & STAN WEIR



**SAM FRIEDMAN**

**S**tan Weir's "A Tale of Two Cities: Gdansk and San Diego", in the winter '81 issue of *Against the Current*, was useful as a comparison of the solidarity in Poland and the union-busting splitting by American union officials. It also did a good job of explaining what Weir means by informal work groups and work culture. Indeed, it helped me to crystallize the unease I have felt with his use of these concepts—and how I think we should use them, but go beyond them.

Weir is right in thinking that informal work group and work culture are useful in explaining what people do and experience at work. They are important ideas for left teaching and strategy. However, in isolation, they can be misleading. Work groups may be the basic units in workplace action, and the workplace culture may shape what is possible—but neither concept deals adequately with the dynamics of changing a workplace or of organizing action. For this, we need the concept of a "stratum of activists" who see it as their role to encourage and lead activism and to shape the workplace culture in ways that make this possible and effective.

A few examples will clarify this. First, one in which I took part. When I taught at Montclair State College, cutbacks were threatened, and I was one of those scheduled to be laid off at the end of the school year. One day at lunch, 4 or 5 of the activists in my primary work group (department) were having lunch together, and I dropped the idea that in industry such events might spark a wildcat strike. Out of this, we developed the idea of a one-day department "teach-in" against the cuts in which no teaching would occur. A wildcat. But this was not the product of the informal work group as a whole, nor of the work culture—but rather that of the activists within our 12 person work group, and an attempt by the activists to shape our work culture. A process of persuasion was needed to make it happen—which implies that the informal work group goes through a process of limited division before coming to a unity in action.

Another example. Teamster Local 208 was for years a stand-out as an activist, democratic, wildcat local. In researching for a book on it (*Teamster R&F*, forthcoming, Columbia University Press), I found that the workplace culture was more complex than Weir's concepts alone would suggest. The local's democracy and activism, and that of each trucking barn within it, was based on the existence of activists within each barn and

upon their linking up with each other to form a local stratum of self-conscious activists. In order to understand how 208 changed from bureaucratic inactivity in 1955 to democratic activism in 1965, I had to trace the way in which this stratum of activists developed—and, of course, how it related to the work groups and work cultures in the barns.

I could give many more examples, but see no reason for overkill.

What does this all mean? Simply that we need to consider the development and organization of activists as a component part of informal work groups and workplace culture. To be effective, activists have to remain a vital part of the primary work group in spite of the pressures and temptations to become isolated from it—which Weir describes well in his other writings—and form a component but somewhat distinct part of the workplace culture. But they have to do more than this. They have to develop ideas, organizations, and actions that change the work culture and mobilize the work groups. To ignore the development and organization of activists by simply saying that "leaders come forth" is to ascribe a false (and perhaps romantic) unity to workplace relationships. It may be akin to the mass party concept of looking at workers as an undifferentiated mass—and thus alien to our tradition's understanding that workers differ, and thus some are more and some are less radical, and some are more and some are less activist—and that the organization of radicals and activists, in ways that do not break their unity with the informal work group, is essential.

Thus, it is important that we understand and point to the role of informal work groups and work culture in workplace politics. But it is equally necessary that we see that these concepts, if presented in isolation, convey an overly static and unified picture of the process of shopfloor struggle. The corrective is to consider the ex-

## Against the Current

istence and organization of activists as an equally important concept in theory, and then to work out the ways in which activists can be most effective in shaping activist work cultures that make it easier for work groups to struggle and for the work groups themselves to control their struggle.

### STAN WEIR RESPONDS

Truly, there is dire need for new concepts of the role of radical intellectuals in relation to workplace activism or natural on-the-job radicalism. The long term lack of such new concepts has created a deep uneasiness in the entire socialist community. This does not mean that stagnation is general. Progress has been made. Some socialists have for quite a time realized that the precondition for the progress of workplace activism is not control of it by socialists. Instead, they have recognized that the role of radical intellectual activists from the middle class is to make idea options available to workplace activists for possible test and use. The problem is that the discussion and search which can develop those new idea options has yet to get off the ground.

Whenever there is prolonged inability to come to grips with a problem, it is usually because the existing conceptual arena is in need of widening. I am urging that the body of knowledge and opinion available in existing informal or primary work group studies provides at least a major opportunity to do just that, for both workplace activists and socialist theorists.

Central to the crisis of radical ideology, especially in relation to workplace activism, is the fact that the efforts of activists have for too long been locked into the institutional context created by employers, their minions in government and the captive labor officialdom. The question that nags on is, how are activists to find ways to break their struggles out onto their own turf, onto ground more of their own choosing? Rather than posing a threat, or being diversionist, substitutionist, or romantic, or whatever, hard examination of the role of informal work groups presents an idea area that can facilitate breakout.

At the start of any discussion with an already existing ideological community—with an idea that has been developed "outside" and is thus new—there is advantage to be had if the discussion first concentrates on that idea as it already exists, on its own terms. This for many reasons among which is the view that such an introductory stage provides discussants with at least a common vocabulary and some ability to maximize understanding of differences. Once that is accomplished, the participants can begin to test the new idea on the basis of already held beliefs and vice versa.

As yet there has not been sufficient discussion of informal work groups among socialists to allow agreement on what those groups are. I believe the definition developed by sociologists and anthropologists to be proper and useful at this time and I incorporate it in the definition and subsequent description that I offer below.

The informal work group is that particular workplace formation which is involuntarily created by employer assignment according to the placement of technology and the needs of production. Its members are forced to regularly socialize by the needs of the production process and so are able to socialize for other purposes out of either personal or struggle need.

In the world of work, informal work groups come to provide for their members what amounts to a family on-the-job, torn by hate and love, conflict and common interest. Each group member spends at least half the hours of his or her waking life in the group in associations involving much more time than is spent with wives or husbands, children or friends on the outside. In time it becomes for each the basic "us" organization. All others are "them."

Informal work groups have the ability to exact discipline over their members, most commonly by nurture and isolation, ridicule and recognition. They develop leaders by natural selection, and while oppressive atmospheres can develop within the groups, their internal life cannot be formalized or officialized. They are a bane to bureaucracies. They can and do make life miserable for workplace managers and they can "hardtime" union officials—for progressive as well as reactionary reasons.

Informal work groups are the basic units of what Eric Hobsbawm calls "oral (working class) societies." As such they are also the primary groupings wherein "the inherent ideology"<sup>1</sup> of the working class is developed. In turn, they are the fundamental formations for the creation of working class cultures.

Finally and central, informal work groups are able to exact controls over the production process, at times by conscious act, but constantly though often unconsciously they affect the flow of production as workaday attitudes and emotions within them fluctuate or conflict.

Informal groupings of many kinds form in the places of work. Social groups are, for example, created on a voluntary basis during coffee and lunch breaks and in ride groups. Activists seeking increased effectiveness on a whole range of union and political ideas seek out kindred souls and so build special groups of their own. All of these groups form at work, but none of them are informal work groups. They are not precisely integral to the production process. That all informal work group members are as well members of other important groups that form on the job, both informal and formal, reveals the network through which informal work groups communicate and cross pollenate their ideas, accomplishments and cultures.

Classic informal work group formation occurs in factories, large offices and other places where the labor process demands cooperation. The technology of some occupations, however, allows for only partial group formation and others almost none at all. The truck driving and teaching professions provide example of the latter. While the production of instruction and transport is actually under way, the producers (actual) are rarely allowed the company of co-workers. The people in each of these callings may obtain opportunity to socialize with others before, after or at intervals between the times of direct production, but seldom during class or when rigs are in motion. There are times and conditions of exception, but they are not the rule. To focus on the subject of informal work groups brings into bold relief the special deprivation experienced in occupations of this sort and the value to be had if it is openly recognized and attacked.

In the late 1920's and early 1930's, American Telephone and Telegraph conducted the largest single industrial relations experiment up to or since that time at their Hawthorne (Western Electric) Plant. As a result, the employers, through hired academics, discovered that



work forces are "guilty" of constant "soldiering" or the setting of their own production norms on the basis of both conscious and unconscious conspiracies. In the half century that has followed, what is literally a mountain of employer literature on the subject of informal work groups has been developed. Its substance comprises the bulk of the curricula taught in courses for supervision. The contribution of Nathan Shefferman, who for thirty years was a leading management consultant, is worthy of attention.

Management can no longer afford to deny, obscure, or plead ignorance of the "cliques" within its work-force. These "informal" power groups and their hidden leaders, as they wilfully design, can either help or hinder management, while many in management positions often refuse to admit the existence of these groups until finally there is trouble.

The executive or supervisor is handicapped if he is not constantly aware of the tricks, maneuvers, power plays, inside politics and pressure tactics of these cliques and their leaders, whose self-interest is often a natural threat to management—for their whispers can be more potent than management's commands.

The purpose of this book, therefore, is to reveal the attitudes of these power groups and their leaders, and show the relentless influences they exert on productivity, cost and profit. This book tells the supervisor how he may find these "hidden" leaders. It also tells him:

- who they are
- how they come about
- the group each leads
- the extent of the leader's influence
- what motivates their groups
- what shapes their attitudes
- how to evaluate these group motivations and shift their attitudes.

Executives and supervisors also can learn who can precipitate restrictions of output, instigate indifference to quality, neutralize cost controls, belittle the importance of service, dampen sales enthusiasm, create resistance to change, and frustrate good relationships.

That which makes one management more effective than another is the knowledge, skill and adroitness with which management men recognize and deal with this concept of the influence of informal power groups and their leaders on management affairs and objectives.

Not a year passes without the appearance of new books and studies interpreting or based on the Hawthorne Experiments.<sup>3</sup> The literature is put to many uses. Experienced union organizers know that they cannot possibly approach a workplace as if it is a collection of individuals. Rather, it must be seen as an amalgamation of groups. Find the natural leaders of key informal work groups and they will accomplish the necessary sign ups and organizational work, with the organizer as concert director.<sup>4</sup> To combat the process most effectively, employers in turn focus their counter attacks on the groups.

By the same counter organizational process, already organized employers turn solidarity forms of unionism, created in the original union organizational period, into business unionism. The instructional material available to them often (superficially) sounds neutral. Witness the two quotations just below from industrial relations superstar, Leonard Sayles, in his book *The Behavior of Industrial Work Groups*.

We are beginning to comprehend that the unique contribution of American unionism is the shop level grievance procedure. In other countries trade unions have tended to concentrate either on the political front

or on industry-wide or nation-wide collective bargaining. As we observed in another context, one of the most important factors in explaining the kinds and numbers of grievances entering this process is the strength and determination of the work groups involved. (p. 135)

Of course, in organizing and establishing a local union, the international organization will feel the impact of the internal structure of the plant. Where strong groups are lacking, so may strong leaders be absent and attempts at organization may fail. In the early contact stage, the union may even have difficulty in securing men who can speak for any sizable proportion of the plant; and informants who can assess worker attitudes may be lacking. These "disorganized" situations present the same problems to the researcher who is seeking "opinion leaders." Such men do not exist in some kinds of industrial structures. The situation contrasts sharply with plants in which several to a half dozen key groups control things or at least have a degree of unity and purpose which enables them to work effectively in marshalling support for their objectives. Here the incipient union organization can flourish.

Thus, for both management and the union, the attitudes and activities of these work groups (nestled between the individual employee-union member and the larger institutions of which they are a part) have substantial repercussions. Both management and union need to calculate their influence and power before attempting to put into effect any one of a broad range of policy decisions. Although these groups may not fit neatly into the organizational chart of either larger body (and as we shall see in the next chapter, they are not part of what we traditionally conceive as the informal organization), they are worthy of the administrator's constant attention.

Or course, they would be much less important if collective bargaining functioned like the textbook model: bargaining over the contract and grievances argued rationally in terms of that contract. The formal and the informal grievance process involves just as much bargaining as the negotiation of the labor agreement. In fact, in actual quantity of both issues and time, the day-to-day procedure probably involves substantially more. It is because of the importance of this type of bargaining that interest groups have such a crucial role in the plant community. (pps. 141-142)

A major reason for the concentration on informal work groups by unionized employers is that managements can cage union officials with no strike-arbitration clause contracts and only have to deal with them at negotiation intervals. Worry about official interruptions of production need only occur every two or three years, but surveillance of informal work groups can never be relaxed and there is no formal procedure for disciplining them. And, they regularly force managements into "fractional bargaining."<sup>5</sup>

There has been an increase of employer concentration on the role of informal work groups with each escalation of resistance in the ranks of the labor force since the end of World War II, that is, with the appearance of rank and file rebellions in the early 1950's, with their breakout into the open especially in the five year period from 1964 to 1969, and with the explosion of absenteeism, tardiness and minor acts of industrial sabotage that went to all time highs as the 1960's ended. But anti-informal work groups strategies of the plain industrial relations kind were insufficient to cope with the resistance. American management then embarked on a campaign of new technology introduction not only for purposes of increasing their competitive position, but to break the resistance.

## Against the Current

Nothing so atomizes informal work groups as the insertion of new machines in the production process, particularly those that are computerized or adaptable to computer automation.

Whenever new technology enters a workplace, there is resistance. That is a certainty which employers have learned through long experience. It is improbable that the resistance will come from official union quarters due to the "arrangement" created by contract unionism backed by anti-labor law. Instead, it comes from the ranks. Discipline is applied and heads are made to roll in order to intimidate the ranks into initial acceptance of the new machines. The "initial" period is vital for the employers because once "in," the machines are very difficult to control or eliminate.

Regardless of employer ability to obtain introduction of new technology under the banner "You Can't Stop Progress," as in the longshore, printing and machine tool industries, for example, they have found the resistance costly and are attempting to avoid it. Not only is there a direct money cost, but disciplinary actions against the ranks founded in their informal work groups are in many instances fronted by union officials. It destroys their credibility with the ranks, thus threatening the entire "arrangement."

In order to obtain cooperative attitudes in the ranks during the introduction of new technology, there is now ever growing use of "Quality of Work Life (QWL)" programs. General Motors is a leader among the initiators. With the aid of the UAW's international leadership in Solidarity House the program has been installed in over fifty local workplaces and unions. More productivity through greater efficiency, yes, but more to the point, the programs have come at a time when GM plans a major investment in robots.

Despite all of the above, there exists to my knowledge only one major academic work relating in any way to the subject of informal work groups, from a generally pro-labor point of view.<sup>6</sup> More alarming, there is no union literature on the subject of informal work groups available in any form. The task of making the subject available to the ranks of labor falls to radical intellectuals. Lone and preliminary experiments with the task indicate that such a literature can provide mirrors, visibility, for the lives of millions who come to lose evidence that they do indeed exist and perform the labors which makes society operate. They are ignored by the media and denied credit by all established institutions. Opportunity to examine even existing informal work group studies provides discovery of hidden strengths in addition to self-visibility. With that recognition comes better self-image, a factor without which there is seldom any big break with long habit.

Still more is to be had from the creation of a literature of informal work groups than that mentioned just above. With extremely rare and still brief exception, top union officials continue to insist that employer offensives be met within the confines of contract unionism in its present form, a form totally inadequate to the needs of the ranks. The coal miners strike of 1977-1978, for instance, demanded that the rank and file take on the operators, government and the international union. In order to conduct the strike at all the miners had to create a second and shadow international union on an informal basis. When that strike (to preserve the right to strike for

grievances during term of contract) reached that point where the next logical step for the ranks was to formalize their second union, the government stepped in with full effort to create a so-called stalemate settlement.

New developments of this type are not limited to the coal miners. There is increasing recognition, particularly at local union levels, that automation cannot be dealt with via business union methods. Numerical control (NC) metalcutting machines have recently begun to make local level machinist leaders discuss the limitations of that form of unionism which is totally adapted to contract administration.

It is improbable that the absence of democracy in the Teamsters union is the only major cause for the successful creation of the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU). It persists and grows for other reasons, including the fact that advanced forms of automation are being introduced to the transportation and warehousing industry. And, the crisis cannot be met unless alternative union forms are built.

Longshoremen are unable to meet the challenge of containerization (now in the process of advanced computerization) with the form of union organization developed in the era of break-bulk cargo handling just passed. During the last year the crisis has stimulated formal unity of longshore and tugboat unions on the West Coast. As a result, tugboatmen have become watchdogs for longshore work being done by non-union workers on ships anchored out of view of traditional piers. This represents the first major re-assertion of cross occupational solidarity unionism in the maritime industry since the 1930's. There are other examples of alternative union forms new to the present generation in the labor force, possibly less developed than the examples mentioned above and probably many are unknown to me, but they are there, as demanded by the needs of this new period.

It is imperative that an entire variety of forms which alternative unionism could and might take, be formulated for discussion, experimentation and use. The entire process can be accelerated if it is shown that they have the formidable strength bases that are the informal work groups. Selfless aid to the process by radical intellectual activists will speed creation of that development which occurs whenever movement for change has been successful in previous history:<sup>7</sup> large scale alliances of radicalized workers and intellectuals.

<sup>1</sup>George Rudé, *Ideology and Popular Protest*, Pantheon, 1980. See also the insightful discussion of the ideas in this book by Edward Countryman in *In These Times*, January 14, 1981, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>Nathan Shefferman, *The Shefferman Personnel Motivation Program*, Prentice-Hall, 1955.

<sup>3</sup>For the original and official (condensed) report on the Hawthorne Experiments see, Roethlisberger and Dickson, *Management and the Worker*, John Wiley and Son, 1964.

<sup>4</sup>See example in, George Strauss, "Factors in the Unionization of a Utilities Company," *Human Organization*, Fall issue, 1953.

<sup>5</sup>See David R. Hampton, "Fractional Bargaining Patterns and Wildcat Strikes," *Human Organization*, Fall issue, 1967.

<sup>6</sup>Loren Baritz, *Servants of Power*, 1967.

<sup>7</sup>George Rudé, *Ideology and Popular Protest*, Pantheon Books, \$4.95, paperback, 1980. (already cited above.)





# THE CRISIS OF MAOISM

## PART II: FROM CULTURAL REVOLUTION TO THE SHANGHAI COMMUNE

by Richard Smith

**W**e set out, in the first part of this article (in ATC, Summer 1981), to consider what went wrong with the political perspectives that governed the Chinese revolution in the Mao period. We started with the conception that Mao was a revolutionary, but that his practice and theory, were self-contradictory. Mao's revolutionary theory, based around the ideas of "mass line" style politics, mass mobilization, permanent "class struggle," the "two-line struggle" to socialism, and so forth—aimed to make possible the transition to socialism in China *without* the accompanying deradicalization, degeneration, in a word, the bureaucratization which befell the Russian revolution. Yet today, despite substantial economic development and despite unparalleled anti-bureaucratic campaigns, China's bureaucratic ruling class is now more firmly consolidated and entrenched than ever.

How could this have happened? Many western analysts in the Maoist tradition—perhaps foremost among them, the economists Charles Bettelheim and Paul Sweezy, explain this result as a degeneration of the revolution brought about by an *ideological* shift, a retreat from Mao's *political line*. The post-Mao leadership they argue, abandoned Mao's "socialist line": egalitarianism, moral incentives, the emphasis on building "Socialist Men and Women", to a "bourgeois line": the subordination of politics to economics and production, the reemphasis on material incentives, *thereby* fostering inequality, privilege and hierarchy, and with these, the degeneration of the revolution. For these analysts, in contrast to classical Marxist thought, a successful transition to socialism in China was seen to depend neither upon "objective conditions" such as developed productive forces, industrialization, nor upon the control of production and state power by the industrial working class itself through its own institutions of self-rule such as soviets or workers councils. Instead, what was crucial to Sweezy & Bettelheim was that the ruling party cadre remained *subjectively committed* to "socialist" or "proletarian" politics. Sweezy drew this

line of argument out to its logical conclusion claiming that in third world countries today, the tasks of socialist revolution and socialist construction have fallen to what he termed the "substitute proletariat": party organizations of revolutionaries recruited from a variety of classes, who become organized, disciplined and politicized in the common struggle of protracted revolutionary war, and compelled, in order to survive and succeed, to adopt "essentially proletarian attitudes and values": collectivism, egalitarianism, self-sacrifice, etc. The idea was that these values, imprinted in the heat of guerrilla warfare (and periodically renewed through "cultural revolutions"), would then *carry forward* to endow the revolutionary party with the capacity to revolutionize the whole society from above and complete the tasks of socialist industrialization at the same time.

We submitted this view to an extensive critique in which we argued that it was not so much the *retreat* from Mao's politics but rather those politics themselves, and particularly Mao's strategy of cadre-led revolution and development, that actually promoted the rise and consolidation of the bureaucracy. Maoism we said, was based on a fundamentally utopian and idealist proposition: the

## Against the Current

notion that socialism could be built in China by a substitutionist party and in the absence of developed means of production. In rejecting the working class, replacing it by a substitutionist cadre party, and in rejecting a revolutionary internationalist strategy in favor of a strategy of autarkic socialist construction ("self-reliance"), Mao, we said, faced impossible contradictions: thus we said that if one started with the assumption that the party (and not the working class) is agent of socialist revolution, and that it was the cadres' job to remold the masses, then who would "revolutionize" the cadres? And if the cadres were vested with a monopoly of political and economic power, what would prevent them from using this power to follow their own material interests, to transform themselves into a new exploiting and ruling class? These were problems we said, that the "mass line" could not solve—problems that required real democratic control from below, by the working class.

Further, we argued that in the absence of an industrialized economy, Mao could not escape the need for "primitive accumulation" to get economic development. A strategy of self-industrialization meant the need to subordinate consumption to accumulation, and this required a repressive state. How could one simultaneously "squeeze" the direct producers and have popular power or socialist relations of production?

We traced the origins of these contradictions to their historical roots in the Communist Party's divorce from the Chinese proletariat in the late 1920's, and the decision by the Maoist wing of the Party to relaunch the revolution as a guerrilla war from a peasant base. That decision, we noted, had important consequences which profoundly shaped the character of the Party and its relationship to Chinese society down to the present day.

China's working class, though a minority, was organized and concentrated in modern industry, and involved in the national and international division of labor. It was in its *class interest* to aim at planning and running a national economy and to reach out for help internationally.

By contrast, although the peasantry provided the Party with an enormous reservoir of "revolutionary fighters," its driving interests were petty bourgeois in that the whole thrust of the peasant movement was towards the division of the land, toward small property, etc. and not toward socialism, or even industrialization. *By itself*, the peasantry was incapable of posing a revolutionary *alternative* to the existing social order. Moreover, because the peasants were dispersed and sharply divided by sectional and local interests, they were incapable of organizing themselves as a coherent and cohesive national force.

So long as they confined themselves exclusively to this rural milieu, therefore, Mao and his comrades could look to the peasants' support but they could not look to the peasants to *lead* the revolution, much less to lead it in a socialist direction. So in this context, they were forced to make the party substitute for the working class, to construct an entirely new *subjectively socialist* force, distinct from the peasantry. This was the "substitute proletariat," the "vanguard party." We described how, in the nineteen thirties and forties, the Maoist leadership built this substitutionist party out of sections of the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie: radical students, mutinous KMT soldiers, lumpen bandits, and eventually, the peasantry itself. But they organized them not *as producers* but by

lifting their recruits *up* and out of the village life, *detaching* them from their former occupations, their former connection to production, and *remolding* them through intense political education and military discipline into an independent social and political force—a party-army dedicated to fighting for the peasants' interests (against the landlords and the Japanese occupation armies) in the short run, but committed at the same time to a longer-run socialist program.

In our account of the Yenan period, we tried to show how tendencies toward bureaucratization of the party were already "built-into" the party-mass relationship even in this early period. These were rooted first, in a basic contradiction between the peasants, especially the poorest peasants "blind" struggle for the land versus the Party's strategic need to hold the rural class struggle in check in order not to alienate the more productive richer peasants and landlords whose economy was crucial to support of the party-army.

Secondly, and of more fundamental importance, the peasants' petty bourgeois and localist interests ultimately conflicted with the Party's long-term national and socialist goals. We saw how Mao balanced these parallel and divergent tendencies through the development of "mass line" style politics. By sharing the poverty of the masses, by supporting the peasants' struggle for the land, by educating the peasants and involving them in building peasant associations, rural cooperatives, women's organizations, etc., and by constructing extraordinarily uncorrupted rural governments, the Communists built an immense base of political and military support in the peasantry. But as we also pointed out, while mass line politics elicited the initiative and participation from below, it was at the same time, fundamentally *anti-democratic*. Peasants were encouraged to participate in local governments, in local elections, etc. but their participation was limited mainly to implementation of Party policy and *criticism* of the performance of officials—rather than popular formulation of policy and control over cadres and officials. Real political power remained lodged at the top, in the hands of the cadre. And this was the problem. For as Mao found out, already in the Yenan period, the cadre party was increasingly subject to elitist and bureaucratic tendencies. And in combating these tendencies he was handicapped by his own reluctance to help establish institutions of democratic control from below that could control the cadres. This, of course, was rooted in the Party's shift to the countryside. For again, whereas workers' democracy and socialism are compatible, and whereas workers' democracy is central to the prevention of bureaucratization, and to assure rational planning, equal distribution, etc., by contrast, the establishment of a *peasants* democracy would have meant no socialism and possibly no revolution. So long as the Party remained confined to this peasant milieu, it could not try to prevent bureaucratization by relying on bottom up democratic control, but had to rely on the cadres. Mao could and did try to reform them through party "rectification" campaigns and through criticism from the masses, but in the last analysis he had to reinforce, indeed *strengthen* their objective position of power in the base areas, and thereby to reinforce at the same time, their bureaucratization.

Finally, we recalled how the Party's isolation from the international workers movement, and the years of rural



guerrilla struggle tended to push the party in a nationalist and voluntarist direction. On the one hand, Stalin's efforts to subordinate the Chinese revolution to Russian state interests undermined the potential, in Mao's mind, of international solidarity and support. On the other hand, the successful experience of Yen'an "self-reliance" tended to promote in the minds of the leadership, an overestimation of the potentials of ideology and mass mobilization for socialist construction.

Thus, while it is quite true as Sweezy, Bettelheim and others have pointed out, that the experience of the Long March, the years of common struggle in revolutionary war, and the rectification campaigns all heightened the comradeship, collectivist spirit, and dedication of the cadre party-army, it was equally true (which Sweezy and Bettelheim et al. do *not* see) that this same experience also tended to reinforce the substitutionist party as a *bureaucratic and nationalist*, if as yet little privileged elite. By virtue of its self-organization and its command (within the base areas) of political and military, if not as yet economic power, the party cadre-bureaucracy already constituted *embryonically*, a potential ruling class.

With the victory of the revolution in 1949, the contradictions and tendencies latent in the pre-revolutionary period rapidly came to the fore. While the land reform and the expulsion of the old corrupt and imperialist-backed regime brought substantial improvements to China's masses, we noted the extraordinary swiftness with which the party cadres began to realize these class tendencies. When the CCP assumed power and the party-army became a party-state, it secured an unchallenged monopoly of political power, and through its "ownership" of the state, unchecked access to the income generated from state-owned industry and industrial and agricultural taxation. In this connection we recalled Mao's dismay, in 1957, at the way in which his party comrades had shed their guerrilla life-style and seemed far more interested in consolidating their positions of power and helping themselves to the social surplus than in "serving the people." We saw how, by the mid-1950's, cadre corruption and authoritarian rule, combined with the party's strategy of building socialism through forced surplus extraction, resulted in increasing alienation and popular disaffection from the party and government.

Thus peasants who had fought alongside the Communists to get rid of the landlords so that they could enjoy the fruits of their labor, now resisted the efforts of the state to take away their surpluses to fund accumulation for industrialization. As the state stepped up taxation and accumulation, they cut back on production. This provoked increasingly serious grain crises by the mid-fifties that brought widespread food shortages and undermined industrialization.

Likewise, workers' resistance began to appear taking the form of absenteeism, slowdowns, and ultimately, wide-spread strikes in 1955-6. This we argued, was largely due to the fact that workers were denied decision-making power on economic policies such as accumulation and distribution of the social surplus, had no say in formulation of national (or international) policies and priorities, and were subject to bureaucratic top-down control and harsh labor discipline. Lastly, we rounded out the picture of China's crisis in the mid-50's by indicating how bureaucratic-managerial self-interest,

careerism and local particularism accounted for serious distortions and mismanagement of the economy by diverting surpluses to local projects or private use, thus undermining central planning and accumulation.

In response to the deepening crisis, Mao launched the Great Leap Forward in the winter of 1957-58. Recalling the spirit of Yen'an, Mao hoped to politically "revolutionize" the cadres and boost the commitment and involvement of the masses to break through the economic impasse by reviving the lessons of Yen'an "war communism": people over machines, mass mobilization, mass line style politics, egalitarianism, etc. As we saw, however, there was in fact, a vast difference between Yen'an and the Great Leap Forward. It was one thing to mobilize peasants in support of a party-army whose program, "land to the tiller" promised an immediate improvement in the peasants livelihood. But it was a quite different matter to convince peasants and workers in the GLF to *sacrifice* their living standards for accumulation and industrialization. Workers and peasants wanted industrialization for the improved living standards it could bring—but *not* if they had to pay for it with huge sacrifices in the present, and for a very long time to come. It was particularly difficult to get them to accept such sacrifices without *real popular control* over these basic decisions about their lives, about how much for accumulation vs. consumption, about who should sacrifice and for how long, about where national priorities should be placed, etc.

In this respect we saw that Mao's efforts to overcome the alienation of the direct producers, to remove the barriers posed by entrenched and privileged managers and bureaucrats by encouraging bottom-up participatory leadership, criticism from below, and so forth, fell *far short* of what was really needed. We pointed out that here again, much as in the Yen'an rectification campaigns, Mao mobilized the masses to *criticize* the bureaucracy and gave them free scope on the shop floor and in the communes to use their initiative and creativity to *boost production*. But he still stopped short of helping the masses, even the workers, to gain real democratic control over the cadre-managerial-bureaucracy, or over fundamental economic planning decisions beyond the shop floor. Yet without these two fundamentals, developed means of production and workers democratic control, "politics in command" turned everything into its opposite: Without imports of capital and modern machinery, the shift to mass mobilizations and "egalitarianism" rapidly exhausted the workforce and even, as we pointed out brought about a generalized depression of living standards. Without democratic planning processes, it was impossible for the leadership to get accurate information from below on resources and the productive capacities of workers, peasants, managers. Consequently, top-down run campaigns such as the intensive farming and "backyard steel" campaigns, produced huge dislocations and massive waste. Further, without real democratic control from below over the cadres and managers, it proved impossible to enforce reforms and arrest the growth of the power and privileges of the bureaucracy.

In the end, as we recalled, the Great Leap Forward crashed against a wall of resistance from China's peasants and workers. Confronted with the threat of economic collapse and peasant revolt, the state retreated in the early 60's. To get production going again, the government was forced to break up the agricultural com-

## Against the Current

munes, restore private plots and market incentives, and in industry, revert to material incentives and fall back on a newly strengthened technical-managerial elite.

Thus the overall results of the Leap were threefold: First, the peasants' successful resistance to communization sharply curtailed accumulation and put the brakes on the industrialization drive. Where, in 1958 Mao predicted that China would "catch up and overtake" Britain in fifteen years, by 1962, a much less confident Mao admitted that this might now take perhaps a century or more. Secondly, the restoration of the market and material incentives only re-inforced the previous self-interested "economistic" approaches to production on the part of direct producers and accelerated social differen-

tiation and growing inequality in every respect. Finally, political demobilization and the strengthening of managerial authority and privileges permitted the bureaucratic strata to emerge from the collapse of the Leap more strongly entrenched than ever before. By the early 1960's, Mao began to warn that China's bureaucracy was becoming a new "red bourgeoisie" as in Russia, and began to speak out on the need for still sharper "class struggle" to save the revolution and prevent its degeneration.

The Great Leap Forward thus left unresolved all the contradictions of the system—indeed intensified them. How Mao would attempt to solve this new crisis is the subject to which we now turn.



## PART II

### TO REBEL IS JUSTIFIED! THE RED GUARDS AND THE LIMITS OF STUDENT POWER

**F**aced with a political and developmental crisis of far greater proportions than in the previous decade, Mao, in 1966, resolved to deepen and intensify the struggle by launching a new ideological offensive, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. But this time Mao started from a much weakened position. The ranks of his supporters had been sharply reduced, and Mao himself had been forced into semi-retirement in 1959 as a result of the disaster of the Great Leap Forward. To recapture the leadership and to revive the revolution, Mao had now to turn entirely *outside* the Party to mobilize new forces against the entrenched bureaucratic apparatus. Yet, characteristically, Mao did not turn to the workers—whom he viewed as part of the *problem*—but instead to the "uncorrupted" youth, the students.

In August 1966, Mao and his closest supporters, the so-called Cultural Revolution Group (CRG) which included his wife, Chiang Ch'ing, his personal secretary, Ch'en Po-ta, and leading radicals Chang Ch'un-ch'iao and Yao Wen-yuan, launched the "Red Guard" movement. Faced with pervasive corruption of his Party, Mao turned to mobilize the dynamism and revolutionary idealism of China's youth as his shock troops against his opponents in the bureaucracy. The students had many long-suppressed grievances. Many resented the way in which the government tried to solve its urban unemployment problem in the early sixties, the result of industrial retrenchment, by "sending down" to the countryside unemployable urban youth—often against their will. Many more resented the crushing suffocation of bureaucratic discipline and paternalism, especially over such issues as free speech, limited college enrollments and the lack of choice in job placements. Mao's famous "Sixteen Points" of August 1966 granted

the students unprecedented freedoms: they were guaranteed free speech and protection from persecution by the party machine; they were urged to "drag out the handful of bourgeois rightists and counterrevolutionary revisionists who were" taking the capitalist road, "to denounce them via *Tatzipao* 'big character' posters, 'great debates' and 'cultural revolution committees and congresses.'" These committees and congresses, the declaration stated, were to be permanent standing mass organizations. They were *not* to displace party committees and state administrative structures but to parallel them.

Furthermore, to ensure that Mao's *direct* relationship to the masses would not be short-circuited by the bureaucracy through the usual bureaucratic procedures of appointment from above, the CRG insisted that these organizations, be *controlled from below* by the masses themselves, through the direct election and recall of all delegates "on the model of the Paris Commune" (point 9). This was a heretofore unheard of liberty. Finally, and not least of all, in a society where internal passports and extremely restricted mobility are the rule, the students were given the year off school and *carte blanche* for unrestricted rail travel throughout China to "exchange revolutionary experiences."

Now Mao's call for the masses to rebel against leaders of the ruling party, the party he himself had built and led to victory and presided over in the sixteen years since the revolution, was unprecedented to say the least—a register of the depth of his commitment to a radical revolutionary vision. Yet from the start he sought to define the *limits* of struggle, however ambiguously. The sixteen Point Decision made it unmistakably clear that the main danger of "bourgeois restoration" came from the Party itself, and explicitly defined the goal of the Cultural Revolution as the "overthrow" and "crushing" of "those within the Party who are in authority taking the capitalist road." Still "95%" of the Party cadres were declared to be "good to very good at the outset" (point 5). Of those to be struggled against, no one was to be "over-



thrown" by force (point 6). Even more restrictive no one was to be criticized *by name* in the press without first getting prior permission of the local (or in some cases, higher level) party committees (point 11). Certain groups—scientists, technicians, white-collar workers were more or less exempted from the start (point 12) while the military and other sensitive sectors were declared off-limits to the Red Guards (point 15). Finally, and most importantly, while "making revolution" students were not to jeopardize production: "Any idea of counterposing the great cultural revolution to the development of production is incorrect" (point 14).<sup>48</sup>

Whatever else, the Sixteen Point Declaration presented a rather odd conception of "class struggle." The Cultural Revolution aimed to be far more thoroughgoing than any previous rectification campaign. At the very least, significant sections of the Party bureaucracy were clearly understood to constitute a new "bourgeois class." And yet, it was far from clear, according to Mao, whether this "class struggle" should aim for a social revolution to actually *overthrow* the Party officials,—or, remaining more strictly *cultural*, should aim merely to "remold" the officials ideologically as in past campaigns. Despite these ambiguities, and despite Mao's imposed limitations, the students grabbed enthusiastically at these unprecedented freedoms, and from mid-August into the fall and winter of 1966 all across China, millions of Red Guards took to the streets. Authorities in schools and in local governments were dragged out, put on "trial," paraded through the streets in dunce caps with placards around their necks denouncing their "crimes." Many were physically assaulted and some, killed.<sup>49</sup>

But the bureaucracy was not so easily humbled. To the consternation of Mao's supporters, local party committees organized *their own* Red Guards thus pitting one student faction against another, each one more "red" than the next. As Red Guards battled one another into the Fall of 1966, the confusion was total, and the confrontations increasingly violent. The confusion was, of course, engendered by the very diffuseness of the movement—its lack of clear goals or program, having been given no purpose beyond criticizing the authorities. For months the Red Guards had no clear idea of exactly *who* where the "bourgeoisie" or even that there were two distinct "lines." It was not until mid-November that Liu Shao-chi and Teng Hsiao-ping were revealed by "the Center" as "the persons in authority taking the capitalist road."<sup>50</sup> This process was not accidental. It was the product of a carefully conceived movement, orchestrated from above, mobilizing at each stage no more forces than it was hoped would be necessary to achieve limited ends—to put enough pressure on the Central Committee to tilt the balance in favor of the Maoists.<sup>51</sup> In retrospect, the Maoists' apprehension was fully warranted: From the very start the movement tended to get out of hand and take on its own momentum, as the Red Guards went beyond the objectives laid down by the CRG and began to strike out *at the bureaucracy as a whole*. Tatzupao went up attacking Chou En-lai, Ch'en Po-ta, Chiang Ch'ing and even Mao himself. The CRG responded in kind with calls to order, denunciations of violence and curtailment of travel by September.<sup>52</sup>

## Mao Turns to the Working Class

Most frustrating to the Maoists, the Red Guards had lit-

tle impact. By November the movement had been going strong for months and still the Maoists had yet to win many significant victories. The CRG had, without difficulty, won control of Peking party committees and municipal government as well as the central press and cultural organs. But beyond these their influence was much less extensive. Liu Shao-ch'i and Teng Hsiao-ping had made "self-criticisms" but managed to keep them from being published. And in Shanghai, the Australian journalist, Neale Hunter, reported that not a single high Party official had been discredited.<sup>53</sup> In exasperation, Mao now took a tremendous gamble. He resolved to take the movement into the factories and mobilize the only force with the social power to really put the heat on the bureaucracy—the industrial proletariat. It was a step not lightly taken, and from the first, Mao and the CRG were extremely reluctant to unleash the working class. Instructions from the Center were cautious though ambiguous, and from start to finish Mao stressed the *limited* scope of the movement. In his words: "Workers should firmly stick to their production posts, firmly uphold the system of eight hours, and make revolution only in the spare time outside their working hours."<sup>54</sup> Ma Ta, editor of the *Liberation Daily*, warned the Maoists: "once the Cultural Revolution gets going in the factories, there'll be no end to it."<sup>55</sup> In fact, whether they wanted it or not, the movement had already begun to spread to the factories, as workers, influenced by the revolutionary rhetoric of the leadership and by leftist students, began pressing their grievances as well.<sup>56</sup>

The entry of the workers into the movement, however, presented far more formidable dangers to Mao and the CRG. The Maoists needed to deliver a massive jolt to the system to "shake up" the bureaucracy. This could only be administered by a real mass movement from below. Yet, far more than the directionless and powerless student movement, such a movement of workers posed a potential threat to the bureaucratic system as a whole. In particular, the call to the workers to "make revolution" was taken up as an invitation to press their own claims and aspirations in all fields, from wages and conditions within the factories to broader political questions of workers control. If the workers shared with Mao their hatred of an oppressive and exploitative bureaucracy, they did not share his interests in revolutionary austerity.

## The "January Storm": The Workers Revolution Begins

From mid-December of 1966 through January of the next year, China exploded in massive strikes and insurrections unparalleled since the revolution of 1925-27. Once again the great industrial and commercial city of Shanghai took the lead. Transport, water and electricity were paralyzed and factories shut down. Railway workers seized control of the rail system and struck for ten days. Dockworkers took over the harbor administration and closed the port for several days. Food and retail workers struck for 43 days. By late December, the strikes had spread throughout the industrial centers—to the famous Taching oil fields, the coal mines, the northeast steel plants, and even to factories in Peking itself. Shanghai was also in the lead politically. Whereas in other cities it had been Red Guard groups who first sparked the formation of rebel groups in factories, in

## Against the Current

Shanghai young workers and dissident lower ranking cadres organized independently of the Party and the Red Guards through the summer and autumn, and, in early November, brought together 20,000 workers from some 200 of the city's 800 factories to found the Shanghai Workers Central Headquarters—the first independent workers movement since liberation.<sup>57</sup> This was the nucleus of what would become the Shanghai Commune. Foremost among the workers' demands were calls for higher wages, shorter hours, safer working conditions, payment of wage arrears and overtime, and the restoration of free trade unions. But these demands could in no sense be construed as simply "economistic" or "self-interested." Instead, they were strikingly egalitarian. Workers demanded the abolition of managerial and cadre privileges, the reduction of pay differentials among workers, and the abolition of the notorious "contract" labor system.<sup>58</sup>

The Maoist leadership was quick to respond to the emergence of this movement, and on December 12th the CRG dispatched Chang Ch'un-ch'iao to bargain with the striking workers. Chang immediately placed himself in the lead of the movement by bringing his authority (and by implication, Mao's) to the side of the workers in their struggle against the "reactionary" Shanghai authorities, forcing the mayor, Ts'ao Ti-ch'iu and Ch'en P'ei-hsien, first secretary of the Municipal Party Committee to accede to a list of worker demands—in return for a pledge from the workers to stop the strikes.<sup>59</sup>

Two groups in particular stood in the vanguard of the struggle—the railwaymen and the "contract" laborers. The railway workers, massively overburdened and fatigued from months of hauling millions of Red Guards, struck on December 30th, tying up rail transport along the east coast and commanded trains to Peking to press their demands for shorter hours, back pay and overtime pay. They staged demonstrations in Shanghai and Peking, and were hailed in the Maoist press for their "selfless" devotion to the revolution: "They worked day in and day out, ignoring fatigue and personal needs, and facing hard work and problems bravely. In the course of performing their glorious task, the transport workers benefited greatly."<sup>60</sup> But it seems that this was about the only way they would benefit—for it was widely rumored that in its concern to reduce material incentives and to narrow the "three differences" between town and country, the leadership was proposing a 12 percent across-the-board pay cut for rail workers—to bring their wages closer into line with those of rural workers.<sup>61</sup>

The other group whose grievances were especially pressing, and who played a leading role in the 1967 strikes were the "contract" workers. These were rural peasants recruited as seasonal or semi-permanent unskilled labor in the mines (where they regularly comprised from one-half to two-thirds of the labor force), transport and the docks, and factories, while displaced or retired regular workers were taken off the state's payrolls and "sent down" to the countryside. The "worker-peasant system," as it was termed, had originally been proposed by Mao in 1962, and implemented in the following years as another means of eliminating the urban-rural, mental-manual, worker-farmer "differences."<sup>62</sup> But in the context of China's underdeveloped economy this gap could only be narrowed by depressing workers' living standards toward the level of the peasantry, in-

stead of raising the income levels of the peasants. Thus, the system's main effect was to provide a vast pool of cheap labor for the state, which enabled planners to cut consumption costs and channel more money into capital investment. As "temporary" labor, contract workers could not join trade unions, and so were ineligible for free medical care, unemployment and retirement pay, or other benefits. Moreover, their costs of reproduction, i.e. the costs of their families' subsistence, their schooling, etc., everything but their individual subsistence wage while directly employed—was borne by the rural commune and not the state. While individual workers were prohibited from bringing their families with them (and many were away on contracts of from three to seven years), they were required to bring "their essential food grain" with them thereby reducing the "nonproductive expenses of the enterprises. . . ." The *People's Daily* reported that in the 1965-66 winter season, the nation's sugar refineries, "now fully under the new system, discharged more than 7,800 permanent workers." As a result, "the State has saved wages amounting 2.5 million yuan."<sup>63</sup>

The details of the system—enforced by the state and universally resented both by the superexploited "migrant" workers, and by the discharged or "retired" permanent workers—only gained public attention when Chiang Ch'ing and the CRG—looking for allies against their enemies in the bureaucracy—momentarily lent their support to the aggrieved workers' demands for the abolition of the system. Chiang Ch'ing declared that "the whole thing is capitalist" and, blaming Liu Shao-ch'i for its institution, urged the workers to take immediate and radical steps to end the system, to "just wipe out all the offices of labor distribution in the country."<sup>64</sup>

Striking workers were soon joined by other groups. With the momentary relaxation of the party's grip, hundreds of new organizations sprang up all over China bringing long suppressed grievances to the Center: Youth "voluntarily" "sent down" to the countryside and frontier provinces before the Cultural Revolution (as many as 70,000 Shanghai students reportedly had been transferred to remote Sinkiang alone) resented their victimization by the mobilization program, and formed a national organization demanding the right to return to the cities. Ex-PLA soldiers, calling themselves by such names as the "Red Flag Army" poured into Peking brandishing grievances against the State Council and national government. Temporary and contract workers in the "All-China Red Workers Rebels' General Corps" demanded full-time employment at standard wages. The "Revolutionary Committee of the Revolt of the Shanghai Apprentices" demanded shorter training periods at depressed wages and more opportunities for full-time employment. Squatters invaded and occupied the apartments of former capitalists and public buildings demanding better housing, etc.<sup>65</sup> As one observer wrote: "Thousands of workers with grievances from a hundred parts of China were now finding that they shared the same wage inequalities, insecure employment, and lack of social and political rights."<sup>66</sup>

### The Shanghai Commune

But by January, the strike wave moved far beyond mere economic demands: All over China workers seized upon the slogans of Mao and the Cultural Revolution



Group—and especially the example of the “Paris Commune” invoked by the CRG for the Cultural Revolution committees and congresses—as models for a new form of government. In a conscious drive for power, workers in factory after factory, threw out the bosses and set up their own democratically elected factory committees and sought to link these up on a local and even national scale.<sup>67</sup> In the cities, party municipal committees were falling like nine-pins before the wave of popular power.

The movement crested in late January when, inspired by the huge popular upsurge, dozens of workers and Red Guard organizations came together to set up the famous “Shanghai Commune.” On February 5th the Commune was inaugurated with a declaration read out to a massed rally of more than a million workers. It said in part:

The former Shanghai Municipal Party Committee and Municipal People's Council have been smashed! All power belongs to the Shanghai People's Commune!

The Shanghai People's Commune is a new organization form created afresh under the guidance of the thought of Mao Tse-tung. . . . This follows the total smashing of the state organ of dictatorship which was usurped by counter-revolutionary revisionists. Its organizational principle is democratic centralism as taught by Chairman Mao. It practices the most extensive democracy over the proletariat. . . . Its leading members [with the exception of its First Secretary, Chang Ch'un-ch'iao and its Second Secretary, Yao Wen-yuan, who were “personally appointed” by Chairman Mao himself] were elected by the revolutionary masses according to the principle of the Paris Commune after the victory was achieved in the general seizure of power from the bottom upward.<sup>68</sup>

### “All Power to the Commune”?

Here, if we are to take Mao at his word, is just what he wanted. After months of struggle the “bourgeoisie” were completely routed, the workers had “seized power” in Mao's name and with his closest associates at their head. Inexplicably, however now that workers' power was an established fact Mao wavered and then reversed himself. It is here that we come back to Charles Bettelheim's influential interpretation of these events (presented in his essay “The Great Leap Backward”). Where CRG statements and documents were invariably given nationwide press coverage, Bettelheim notes: “The Shanghai Commune was not hailed in the central press, any more than was the formation of communes in other cities, such as Taiyuan. Without being officially repudiated, the commune was not, so to speak, ‘recognized’ by the central authority. Some twenty days afterwards, it ceased to exist, with the birth of the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee, presided over by Chang Ch'un-ch'iao who had taken part in the work of the Shanghai Commune, in accordance with the suggestion of the central group and with the approval of all the founding organizations.” “Thus,” he concludes, “in Shanghai as in other cities, the commune form, though it had been mentioned in the sixteen-point declaration of August 1966, was dropped and replaced by that of the revolutionary committee. . . . No real argument justifying this change has ever been set forth.” (GLB, p. 102).

Now Bettelheim's essay is by far the most systematic and critical attempt from a Maoist political perspective, to reconcile Mao's avowed political stance (in support of popular power) with the apparently contradictory actions of Mao and the Mao group during the Cultural

Revolution. And characteristically, Bettelheim's method is to present a highly abstract, and as we shall see, quite ahistorical account of the Shanghai Commune, which aims to absolve Mao from direct responsibility for the Commune's defeat. Thus, alluding to Chang Ch'un-ch'iao's televised speech on February 24th in which Chang relayed Mao's “directives” to supporters of the Commune, Bettelheim writes:

Mao did not question the principle of the commune, but he did question whether the correct procedure had been followed in forming it. He doubted, moreover, whether the model inspired by the Paris Commune could be adopted anywhere but in Shanghai, China's most advanced working-class center. He also wondered about the international problems that would result from the proclamation of communes all over China. These observations were not very convincing, and took the form of questions rather than arguments. In any case, they did not lead to a condemnation of the commune, but were only an appeal for caution and prudence. (GLB, p. 102)

But Bettelheim is not really telling us quite the whole story. For in fact Mao not only *explicitly rejected the Commune as “ultra-democratic”* but insisted on its dissolution and demanded the replacement of communes with “Three-in-One Revolutionary Committees.” Had Bettelheim quoted Mao's statements directly this would be more than clear: On hearing that the Shanghai rebel organizations had called for the “elimination of all chiefs,” Mao declared:

The slogan of “Doubt everything and overthrow everything” is reactionary. The Shanghai People's Committee demanded that the Premier of the State Council should do away with all heads. This is extreme anarchism, it is most reactionary. . . . In reality there will still always be “heads.” It is the content which matters.

But who was to decide the “content”? Who was to decide who should run society, the Party or the workers, the proletariat? Mao continued:

The people of Shanghai like the People's Commune very much, and like that name very much. What shall we do? . . .

If everything were changed to the Commune, then what about the party? Where would we place the party? Among commune committee members are both party members and non-party members. Where would we place the party committee? There must be a party somehow. There must be a hard core, no matter what we call it. Be it called a Communist Party, or a social-democratic party. But can the commune replace the party?

His conclusion left no room for doubt:

I think that we had better change the name, and not call it a commune, we should still convene the National People's Congress, and the State Council. Let the Shanghai People's Commune be changed to Shanghai Municipal Revolutionary Committee (*Miscellany*, pp. 451-455)

On February 27th, the Shanghai People's Commune passed into history and was replaced by the “Shanghai Municipal Revolutionary Committee” headed by Chang Ch'un-ch'iao and backed by the army. Bettelheim, not surprisingly, asks “how the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, who had supported the political form of the commune, went back, in practice, to their previous attitude, claiming that China was not “ready” for this political form” (GLB, p. 103). Indeed, this was precisely the question asked by the revolutionary left—the Red Guards and revolutionary workers, when Mao made his right-about-face. As Sheng-wu-lien (shortened form of

## Against the Current

Hunan Provincial Proletarian Revolutionary Great Alliance Committee), perhaps the most famous of what were soon to be denounced by Chiang Ch'ing, Chen Po-ta and the rest of the CRG as "ultra-left" and "Trotskyist" organizations, declared in its blistering manifesto, "Whither China":

As everybody knows, the greatest fact of the January Revolution was that 90% of the senior cadres were made to stand aside. . . . What the editorial [Mao's May 7, 1966 Directive] had called for was truly realized, i.e., that "the masses should rise and take hold of the destiny of their socialist country and themselves administer the cities, industry, communications, and finance."

The January Revolution turned all this within a very short time from the hands of the bureaucrats into the hands of the enthusiastic working class. *Society suddenly found, in the absence of bureaucrats, that they could not only go on living, but could live better and develop quicker and with greater freedom.* It was not at all like the intimidation of the bureaucrats who, before the revolution, had said: "Without us, production would collapse, and the society would fall into a state of hopeless confusion."

As a matter of fact, without the bureaucrats and bureaucratic organs, productivity was greatly liberated. After the Ministry of the Coal Industry fell, production of coal went on as usual. The Ministry of Railways fell, but transportation was carried as usual. . . . The management of industrial plants by the workers themselves after January was impressive. For the first time, the workers had the feeling that "it is not the state which manages us, but we who manage the state." For the first time they felt that they were producing for themselves. Their enthusiasm had never been so high, and their sense of responsibility as masters of the house had never been so strong.

*Why, then, did Chairman Mao, who strongly advocated the "commune" suddenly oppose the establishment of the "Shanghai People's Commune" in January? This is something which the revolutionary people find hard to understand.*

Chairman Mao, who foresaw the "commune" as the political structure which must be realized by the Cultural Revolution, suddenly proposed: "Revolutionary Committees are fine." (emphasis added).

The manifesto went on to locate the source of the weakness of the "ultra-left" and the workers' movement as follows:

This is the first time the revolutionary people tried to overthrow their powerful enemy. How shallow their knowledge of this revolution was! Not only did they fail to consciously understand the necessity to completely smash the old state machinery and to overhaul some of the social systems, they also did not even recognize that their enemy formed a class. The revolutionary ranks were dominated by ideas of "revolution to dismiss officials," and "revolution to drag out people. . . ." Proposing the three-in-one combination is tantamount to helping the reinstatement of the bureaucrats already toppled in the January Revolutions.<sup>69</sup> (emphasis added)

### Mao, Bettelheim and the Question of Popular Power

Bettelheim's account of the counterrevolution which followed the collapse of the Shanghai Commune is based centrally around the effort to efface Mao's complicity in the events by the claim that Mao and the CRG were only a *minority* in the Party, and thus were overwhelmed by the conservative forces:

The supporters of the revolutionary line did not

manage to strengthen their position in the party sufficiently to prevent comebacks by increasing numbers of Rightist and revisionist elements. Finally the *coup d'etat* of October 1976. . . . was the culmination. . . . of a process which had been going on for years. (GLB, p. 104)

That Mao's faction in the party was a minority is indisputable. But this cannot be the explanation. For to begin with, we have Mao's own word for it that he himself opposed the Commune. What's more, he opposed not merely its "procedure" but as we have already seen, the very *principle* of mass democratic rule from below—the direct election and recall of leadership. As he told a visiting Albanian delegation in August 1967:

Some people say that election is very good and very democratic. I think election is only a civilized term. I myself do not admit that there is any true election. I was elected People's Deputy for Peking District, but how many people are there in Peking who really understand me? I think the election of Chou En-lai as Premier means his appointment by the Center.<sup>70</sup>

Secondly, in rather sharp contrast to the disunity and political unclarity of the mass movement, what was most apparent about the events from February forward was precisely the *unity of the party*—both "left" and "right" *over against the militant workers and the "ultra-left."* To take an obvious example, it was not the "rightist" Shanghai Municipal Party Committee (whose leaders, Ts'ao Ti-ch'un and Ch'en P'ei-hsien were in any case under arrest), but the "leftist" Chang Ch'un-ch'iao who brought down repression on the workers and students movements in January and February 1967. Barely weeks before, Chang and the rest of the CRG had urged on the masses to "make revolution to the end!", to "seize power" from the "bourgeois" bureaucracy. Now in January and February, he brought in the PLA and his own Public Security forces to: break up meetings of the "Red Revolutionaries," Shanghai's largest student organization (on January 27th), to raid the headquarters and arrest the leaders of the "Red Flag Army" (reported February 19th), to suppress an organization of "sent-down" permanent Shanghai workers (reported February 24th), and to take over the docks, railway stations, water works, power plants, radio stations, post office and banks and other key installations—often against the resistance of workers who had already seized these facilities.<sup>71</sup> Likewise, where in the months up till January, the "leftist" Chang and others in the CRG had proclaimed that "only the masses can liberate themselves," now in his speech of February 24th, Chang told Shanghai's workers that while they "may be adept in the management of one workshop," they "lacked the experience" to run a complex industrial metropolis such as Shanghai. Shanghai he flatly stated, could not be run by its workers and students alone. For this they would need to rely on two "allies": the Peoples' Liberation Army, especially its higher ranking officers, and the Party cadres, especially the senior veterans—"the great majority of whom are good or comparatively good."<sup>72</sup>

In this, as in so many other instances, explanations of Chinese politics on the basis of party divisions between "reactionary rightists" and "revolutionary leftists" won't stand up to the historical evidence. Bettelheim, as a sympathetic yet critical Maoist, is reluctant to fully accept such explanations arguing that the problem is more deeply rooted in the *entire* party's fundamentally "contradictory relations with the working masses." (GLB,



pp. 104-105). And here, he goes right to the point—which from our perspective is the very heart of the matter. The question for revolutionaries, he says, should be:

Is power in the hands of the masses, of their organizations and advanced elements, or is it in the party's hands? Or, putting it another way, is power wielded by the working people or is it wielded for them (assuming that the ruling party can remain in the service of the working people without being placed under effective control by them)? (emphasis in original) (GLB, p. 105)

In striking departure from his previous "partyist" perspective (cf. OTTS\* pp. 61-65; or CS\* 1, p. 109), Bettelheim now looks to the working class as the instrument of socialist revolution, and holds up the commune-state as the model of a workers government:

For Marx, in *The Civil War in France*, the commune is the organ of power, the political form of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Similarly, for Lenin, in *State and Revolution*, the soviets are the organs of power of the working people. In those two works the leading role of a revolutionary party is not even mentioned. In 1919 Lenin noted, as a negative fact, that the soviets were not, as they should have been, "organs of government for the working people by the advanced section of the proletariat, but not by the working people as a whole." This situation was not destined to change, and led to the complete loss of power by the Soviet working people. (GLB, p. 105)

In saying this, Bettelheim is not so much rejecting the need for a revolutionary party, as he is rejecting a certain form—the Stalinist bureaucratic party. In its place, Bettelheim is *beginning* to point to the need for a revolutionary party comprised of direct producers, leading (and learning from) the workers' movement, a party that earns the right to represent them by winning their support *politically*, that is subject to the *democratic will* of the working class in their own *institutions of self-rule*, classically the soviets or workers' councils. Consistent with this conception, Bettelheim does not fail to censure the Chinese Party leadership, the Maoist "lefts," for their failure to support the Commune they themselves had inspired: "The substitution of revolutionary committees for the commune form in Shanghai, the role accorded to the PLA in choosing representatives of the masses, and the way in which these representatives were appointed to the revolutionary committees, all implied abandonment of the orientation which had been explicitly adopted in August 1966." (GLB, pp. 105-106).

## The "February Adverse Current": Mao Leads the Reaction

Yet it is just here that Bettelheim's consistency breaks down. For it is the central thrust of his argument that the "revolutionary line" was defeated by the *seemingly inexorable resurgence* of the "rightists" and "conservatives." In Bettelheim's account, these forces "narrowed the front of the attack" to sacrifice a few individuals—Liu Shao-ch'i, Teng Hsiao-ping and others—in order to save the rest of the bureaucracy, brought in the PLA to enforce the transfer of power from the communes to the "Three-In-One Committees," and demobilized the mass movements (GLB, pp. 103-104). But what, we must ask, gave the conservatives such resilient strength? According to Bettelheim, Mao and "the most consistent promoters of

the revolutionary line" were isolated because of the "slight relative weight of the *Chinese proletariat*" (GLB, pp. 125-126; emphasis in original). Consequently, they were forced *against their will* to make compromising alliances, to rely on other forces such as Lin Piao and the army (GLB, p. 125).

Now for readers of Bettelheim's essay, this must come as a very curious statement indeed—since it was precisely the whole point of his original argument to demonstrate, despite their numerical weakness, the massive social power and *strength* of the Chinese proletariat. *Under their own power* the workers proved themselves able to throw out the bosses and set up factory committees to run industry, to overthrow the Party-state authorities in Shanghai and other cities and supplant these structures with democratic self-governing communes. As Bettelheim himself has shown, for a brief few weeks power lay "in the streets"—in the spontaneous self-organized democratic institutions of the working masses. All the forces Mao needed lay right to hand. Yet, what happened?

Instead of aligning himself with the workers against the bureaucracy, Mao called in the *army* at the end of January 1967 "to support the left"—not against the right but *against the workers and Red Guards* in the factories and schools.<sup>73</sup> The cultural revolution threatened to become a social revolution. And contrary to Bettelheim, it was the Great Helmsman himself who led the reaction—and never troubled to deny it: "Who is the black hand? The black hand is still not captured. The black hand is nobody else but me. . . I am the black hand that suppressed the Red Guards" Mao told a startled Red Guard audience in July 1968 (*Miscellany*, pp. 469-70, 480). It was, after all, Mao who dispatched Chang Ch'un-ch'iao to demobilize the Commune. It was also Mao who called for the "restoration" of disgraced cadres—explicitly rejecting the elective principle and the concept of "rule from below." It was Mao and CRG who, on January 13th, 1967 rejected pay raises for contract and temporary workers "because of circumstances in China," and who from February 17th outlawed as "counter-revolutionary" all the spontaneous organizations of "worker-peasants," unemployed and "sent-down" youth, apprentices, ex-army men, etc. that had emerged in the height of the struggle.<sup>74</sup> It was Mao again, who embraced army chief of staff Lin Piao as his "closest comrade in arms," designated him his "heir apparent" and gave him and the army free rein to impose *by force* the "power seizures" by "Three-in-One Committees" against popularly controlled mass organizations throughout China's twenty-eight provinces. This bloody struggle plunged the country into near civil war for two years and cost, the regime now admits, many tens of thousands of lives.<sup>75</sup> And finally, it was Mao who, in fear of the mounting danger of the Soviets and the failure of the Cultural Revolution to generate a breakthrough in economic development, initiated the right turn in foreign policy extending the invitation to Richard Nixon in 1972.

## CONCLUSION

### "Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?"

Where did Bettelheim and Sweezy go wrong? Mao mobilized the workers to "make revolution," but the Cultur-

\*For references to initial abbreviations, see Part I in *Against the Current* #3.

al Revolution put his ideas to the test. China's workers moved into struggle over material gains, but almost immediately posed the question of power—challenging Party rule and creating new institutions of self-rule in its place. And they showed that if the workers took power, they would do so in their own interests, to better their conditions instead of accepting permanent austerity; to take control over their lives and win the greatest possible freedom, instead of handing over power to a new dictatorship of "radicals." But this struggle for *self-emancipation*, for "socialism from below" collided head on not only with the right wing of the bureaucracy but with the Maoist "lefts"—for whom the masses were at best the object, not the subject, of history, the "blank sheet" to be "written upon," "mobilized" and emancipated "from above" by an omniscient revolutionary elite. So, when it came down to the workers or the bureaucracy, Mao went with the bureaucracy. Mao's cynical about face should hardly have surprised western Maoists. Rather, that outcome was predictable and flowed with rigorous logic from the first premises of Mao's theory of the substitutionist party. Having rejected the working class as the agent of socialist revolution, on whom else could he rely?<sup>76</sup> Despite all his talk about "relying on the masses", Mao did not trust the masses, particularly the workers, to build socialism or to run society themselves. For Mao, the Party, and the Party alone, was the repository of socialist ideas, the guarantor of socialist direction to the revolution and the economy. The "masses," the workers and peasants, spontaneously generated "bourgeois" and "economist" ideas and tendencies. So, no matter how corrupt or bureaucratic the Party had become, Mao saw no choice but to side with the bureaucracy against the movements for popular power. But in so doing he doomed his own conception of an anti-bureaucratic socialism by *preparing* the victory of the bureaucratic right. Thus the victory and final consolidation of Teng Hsiao-ping and the most conservative forces in the Party was virtually a foregone conclusion. After Mao undermined the mass movements and thereby cut himself off from the potential of mass opposition to the bureaucracy, was it any wonder that the bureaucracy would strengthen itself?

Those who, like Bettelheim and Sweezy, see the revolutionary and antibureaucratic side of Mao (which was genuine), but do not see that Mao was *at the same time* the original architect and main bulwark of the bureaucratic totalitarian state, fail to grasp the inherently contradictory and utopian character of Maoism, and therefore miss an essential dynamic of the Chinese revolution.

### **The Cadre-Bureaucracy: A Substitute Proletariat or a Substitute Bourgeoisie?**

There is no question that in trying to make a socialist revolution in China, Mao faced enormous problems—in particular, China's underdevelopment and the absence of revolution in the advanced countries. But as we've tried to show here, these objective difficulties were immeasurably compounded by Mao's strategy of revolution. Instead of looking to the working class, building the broadest possible democracy, and self-industrializing as

a "holding operation" while looking for openings internationally to spread the revolution (the "permanent revolution" strategy of Bolsheviks), Mao made self-industrialization through accumulation (surplus extraction) and reliance on the substitutionist party his mainstays. These virtually insured degeneration, whatever the objective possibilities.

Mao's ideas and revolutionary strategy were crucially shaped, as we've tried to indicate, by the failure of China's proletarian revolution in the late 1920's, by Stalin's efforts to subordinate the Chinese revolution to Russian state interests, and especially by Mao's substitutionist political practice of the thirties and forties. Out of these experiences, Mao justified the *substitutionist* vanguard party by the backwardness of China's peasant masses. This had a certain rationale in the context of the peasant milieu of the revolutionary years (whether the party's abandonment of the industrial working class in the interim was in any sense "justified" is another matter). But this substitutionist practice was, as we saw, definitely *not* justified in the context of the self-active workers movements of the post-revolutionary period, especially the 1960's. That the party leadership did not look to the working class, even at the height of the Cultural Revolution, reflected the fact that in its long substitutionist experience, the cadre party had developed *its own* distinct material and social interests which were not the same as the workers, and not socialist. Mao's idea had been that through continuous ideological struggle, the party could remain a "classless" purely political force acting in the interest of the working class. But as we saw, the party's conception of "socialist revolution" directly reflected its own social composition and objective position in society. This was a party recruited from the middle classes and petty bourgeoisie, organized above society as an autonomous party-military-bureaucracy, and in control of production as collective "owners" of the state and the social surplus, not as direct producers. Therefore, while *subjectively* socialist, the Party's vision and strategy of socialism was revolutionary but substitutionist and nationalist, collectivist but anti-democratic and bureaucratic, based on mass mobilization but under authoritarian control. Such a program could and did lead to economic development within limits, but it could never lead to a socialist society.

Thus, without a revolutionary internationalist strategy designed to get help for industrialization from workers in the advanced countries (by helping them to overthrow their own ruling classes), Mao had no alternative but to try to self-industrialize. But as we saw, that could only be done, within a national framework, by reverting to exploitative methods of surplus extraction: holding down wages, squeezing the peasants. However much Mao may have wished otherwise, a nationalist strategy meant imposing an exploitative and repressive dynamic of "primitive accumulation" similar to that which the capitalists had imposed in the west and Stalin in Russia. While it may be argued that world revolution was not on the agenda in the post-war period, nonetheless there were significant openings—in Hungary, Indonesia, Vietnam, Chile, France, Portugal and elsewhere, especially in the Sixties. But Mao chose not to take advantage of these openings, and in some cases actually supported their repression (Hungary, Ceylon, etc.). It was not a question of the need to compromise or the lack of



resources. Compromise was necessary to survive, but this did not require his open political and military support to reactionary regimes. Mao's foreign policy was no aberration, as some like to think. It was organically linked to his domestic policy. If Mao did not help China's own workers to take power, should we be surprised that he did not support the struggles of workers in Chile, etc.? Why should he? Mao conceived of "socialist construction" not through the transfer of resources from the advanced to the backward countries, but through internal accumulation paid for by China's workers and peasants. So he saw no compelling need to support international revolution because he did not look to an international workers' government to gain access to technology and resources in the world economy. Conversely, since the survival of the party bureaucracy depended on a state-based military industrial structure that could only be endangered by an internationalist policy, there were very good reasons for Mao not to support revolutions or, à la Stalin, to subordinate them to state interests.

Likewise, without relying on China's working class, Mao could not prevent the bureaucratization of the revolutionary party or the alienation of the masses. A strategy of self-industrialization meant the need to impose huge sacrifices on direct producers, so he couldn't rely on popular control since they would naturally resist this as a long-term policy. But without popular control workers and peasants were alienated and Mao couldn't get them to voluntarily contribute their initiative, their creativity and energy to improve productivity within the means available, and so had to force them to do so. Without democratic control of production, the party leadership could not get accurate information from below on factory and commune resources, capacities and productive potentials. So they couldn't rationally plan or maximise potentials actually available, but had to rely on top-down bureaucratic planning with its inevitable miscalculations and blunders like the Great Leap Forward. Finally, without institutions of popular democracy to supervise and control officials through elections, right of recall, etc. there was no way to enforce the responsiveness and accountability of cadres and managers. Mao's efforts to check the bureaucratization through ideological struggle and mass "criticism" proved less and less effective against the increasing real power of the bureaucracy. Thus the bureaucracy steadily evolved into a new ruling class, and Mao into an "anti-bureaucratic" bureaucrat. Mao's own political degeneration simply followed the same downward spiral of his party: from rejection of the working class to reliance on the party cadre; from corruption of the party, to reliance on an ever narrower circle within the party and finally, to his own pathetic self-deification in the cult of the Thought of Mao Tse-tung.

Sweezy was quite correct to highlight the substitutionist role of the party in China's revolution. But in its historic aims and aspirations—national development and bureaucratic rule—the cadre party substituted not for the proletariat but for China's national bourgeoisie. In the heyday of the third worldism of the new left, Sweezy, Bettelheim and many others argued that the industrial working classes in both advanced and underdeveloped had been bought off and integrated. The very idea of international, working-class led revolutions appeared to them as "utopian." Instead they looked to substitutionist parties to build autarkic socialisms in the third world.

There is no underestimating the difficulties of building working class revolutionary movements in the industrialized countries, or of linking these systematically to the struggles of revolutionaries in the underdeveloped world. Nonetheless, this remains the only real alternative to the certain utopianism of substitutionism and a strategy of Socialism in One Country. If there is a lesson to be drawn from the Chinese revolution, it is that there is no substitute for the working class and there is no third way for the third world.

#### FOOTNOTES

48. See Jean Esmein, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution*, New York 1963, pp. 93-134; and Neale Hunter, *Shanghai Journal*, Boston, 1969, pp. 65-66, 68-71. For the text of the "Sixteen Points" decision see *CCP Documents of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution 1966-1967*, Union Research Institute: Hong Kong 1967, pp. 42-54.
49. For an unforgettable portrait of the impact of the Cultural Revolution and the Red Guard movement upon the lives of ordinary Chinese, see Chen Jo-hsi, *The Execution of Mayor Yin and Other Stories from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*, London, 1978. See also Simon Ley's iconoclastic *Chinese Shadows*, London 1978.
50. Gordon A. Bennet and Ronald N. Montaperto, *Red Guard*, New York 1972, pp. 136-141 and passim; Hunter, pp. 154, 176, 180, 195.
51. Esmein, p. 93.
52. Livio Maitan, *Party, Army and Masses in China*, London 1976, pp. 109-110.
53. Hunter, pp. 111, 134.
54. NCNA, Feb. 10, 1968; SCMP 4119. Also see "Ten Regulations of the CCP Central Committee Concerning Grasping Revolution and Promoting Production," Dec. 9, 1966, in *CCP Documents*, pp. 133-135. See similar statements and reservations by other members of the CRG in Hunter, pp. 111-112, 131, 133, 139-140, 144; and Esmein, p. 200.
55. Hunter, p. 144.
56. Hunter, pp. 131, 133-34ff.
57. Victor Nee and James Peck, editors, *China's Uninterrupted Revolution*, New York 1973, pp. 327-328; and Andrew G. Walder, *Chang Ch'un-ch'iao and Shanghai's January Revolution*, Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, 1978, p. 28.
58. Maitan, p. 125; Esmein, pp. 197-98, 199; Nee and Peck, pp. 337-338; and David Milton and Nancy Dall Milton, *The Wind Will Not Subside*, New York, pp. 186-189.
59. Walder, pp. 28-30.
60. NCNA, January 16, 1967.
61. See "Trouble on the Tracks", *Current Scene*, May 19, 1967; and Colina MacDougall, "Revolution on China's Railroads," *Current Scene*, Aug. 16, 1968.
62. See "Sources of Labor Discontent in China: the Worker-Peasant System," *Current Scene*, Mar. 15, 1968, pp. 1-28; and Colina MacDougall, "Second Class Workers," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (hereafter FEER), May 9, 1968, pp. 306-308. On the origins of the system in the context of post-Great Leap Forward restructuring, see Lynn T. White III, "Workers' Politics in Shanghai," *Journal of Asian Studies* (Nov. 1976), 99, 99-116.
63. *Current Scene*, Mar. 15, 1968, pp. 4-6.
64. "Minutes of Talks with Leading Comrades of the Cultural Revolution Group at Interview Granted Representatives of the All-China Red Workers Rebels' General Corps" (Dec. 26, 1966), quoted in Milton and Milton, *The Wind Will Not Subside*, p. 188.
65. Milton and Milton, pp. 199-200; Hong Yung Lee, *The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, Berkeley 1978, pp. 129-34 ff.; K.S. Karol, *The Second Chinese Revolution*, New York 1973, pp. 214-15; Walder, pp. 39-48.
66. Milton and Milton, p. 186.
67. Esmein, pp. 176-177; and Maitan, p. 125.
68. Shanghai *Wen-hui Pao*, February 6, 1967, excerpted and translated in *The Great Power Struggle in China*, Asia Research Centre: Hong Kong 1969, pp. 89-90.

## Against the Current

The summary here of developments leading up to the formation of the Commune has necessarily been brief and rather simplified. In fact, its political development was extremely complex. The forces comprising the workers movement, like the student movement, were highly factionalized and politically confused. Among the most significant tendencies, we should point to the emergence of major opposition within the Commune movement to Chang Ch'un-ch'iao's "usurpation" of the leadership of the Workers Headquarters and the Commune. Opposition apparently centered around Chang's efforts since early January to sidetrack workers' economic demands, to demobilize strikes and get workers back to work, and most ominously, his use of PLA forces to take over strategic administrative and economic units, airports, communications centers, banks, etc. In reaction, more than half of the "Workers Headquarters" coalition that ultimately founded the Shanghai Commune, including many of the most militant and independent workers groups, broke away in late January to form their own "Shanghai Revolutionary Committee of Broad Unity" under the leadership of two dissident party cadres, Keng Chin-chang and Ch'en Hung-kang. For a time it appeared as if this current might found its own more popularly based "New Shanghai People's Commune." But these hopes proved futile and this tendency dissolved, along with the original Commune, in February. "Factionalism" of course, is no explanation for their demise. Rather that factionalism itself derived from the lack of clear political alternatives to Maoism. However militant and however much their real interests conflicted with Maoism, virtually no student or worker groups proved able as yet to break with Mao and pose a coherent political alternative. As a result, all were demoralized and fell apart when the Maoists and then Mao himself moved to the right and abandoned the Commune and the slogan of popular power. By far the best account of the politics of the Commune is to be found in Neale Hunter's chronicle, *Shanghai Journal*, pp. 244-267, but see also the descriptions by Victor Nee, "Revolution and Bureaucracy: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution" in Victor Nee and James Peck, editors, *China's Uninterrupted Revolution*, pp. 322-414; and Jean Esmein, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution*, chaps. 6&7. I am also very much indebted here to Andrew G. Walder for his painstaking reconstruction of the twists and turns of Chang Ch'un-ch'iao's politics in relation to the workers movement. See his *Chang Ch'un-ch'iao and Shanghai's January Revolution*.

69. "Whither China"; SCMP 4190. The text has been reprinted in full in *The Revolution is Dead, Long Live the Revolution*, edited by The 70's, Hong Kong May 1976, pp. 180-200; and in abbreviated form in *International Socialism* (London, Jun.-Jul. 1969) pp. 23-28.
70. "Mao Tse-tung Talks with Albanian Visitors," *People's China*, p. 265, cited in Milton, pp. 198-99.
71. Walder, *Chang Ch'un-ch'iao*, pp. 52, 58-63, 65.
72. SCMP 4147; Hunter, *Shanghai Journal*, pp. 261-262; and Alexandra Close, "Mao Plays His Last Trump," *FEER* (Mar. 16, 1967), pp. 495-499.
73. Esmein, pp. 178-179; and Jurgen Domes, "The Cultural Revolution and the Army," *Asian Survey* (May 1968), pp. 354 ff.
74. Milton and Milton, p. 200; *Current Scene*, March 15, 1968, pp. 10-12, 16-20. Another eyewitness, the journalist Jean Esmein, who was a strong supporter of Mao, nonetheless presents a thorough description of the systematically conflicting interests between the Maoists and the workers and students at every point along the line. See Esmein, pp. 93, 111, 144-46, 152-54, 162-63, 182 and 198-99.
75. On the military repression of popular organizations, see inter alia, Jurgen Domes, *China After The Cultural Revolution*, Berkeley 1977, pp. 9-22; Karol, chaps. 4&5; and Simon Leys, *The Chairman's New Clothes*, New York 1977, chap. 2.
76. Here we should also point out that however much Mao attacked the symbols of elitism—by abolishing rank insignia in the army, by forcing the Party cadres to "rough it" tilling

the soil a few weeks a year in "May Seventh Cadre Schools," still he never mounted a sustained attack against the substance of bureaucratic privilege: their high salaries, preferred housing, and other perquisites of office. Again, how could he? Given the cadres alienation from society, how could he motivate them to mobilize the masses, and to take the flack for it from below and from above—unless there was something in it for them? Nor was this hypocrisy confined just to the cadres. While prescribing a diet of unrelieved economic and cultural austerity for the masses, rice and revolutionary operas were by no means the staple of the Maoist ruling elite behind the walls of the Forbidden City—as a perusal of Roxane Witke's authorized biography, *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing* makes abundantly clear. On this topic, see besides Witke, David Morawetz, "Walking on Two Legs? Reflections on a China Visit," *World Development* (Aug.-Sept. 1979), pp. 877-891; Richard Curt Kraus, "The Limits of Maoist Egalitarianism," *Asian Survey* (Nov. 1976), pp. 1081-1096; and of course, Simon Leys, *Chinese Shadows*, and idem, *Broken Images*, London 1979.

### ERRATA

Part One of this article contained a number of printing errors and omissions. The most important corrections are as follows:

- p. 48, line 53: The quote from Sweezy is incomplete and should continue after "people":  
Here men and women of various classes and strata are brought together under conditions contrasting sharply with their normal ways of life. They learn the value, indeed the necessity for survival, of discipline, organization, solidarity, cooperation, struggle. Culturally, politically, and even technologically they are raised to a new and higher level. They are, in a word, molded into a revolutionary force which has enormous significance not only for the overthrow of the old system but also for the building of the new.
- p. 51, line 3: The sentence should read: "The Red Army, as Liu Shao-ch'i described it. . ."  
The footnote (#8) was also printed incorrectly. It should read as follows:  
Liu Shao-ch'i to Anna Louise Strong in 1947: *Amerasia* (June 1947). . .
- p. 54, line 17: should read: "But taking away the peasants surpluses. . ."
- p. 59, line 60: A sentence is missing. After "...cadre-bureaucrats," the paragraph should continue:  
"Too often, this shift from market to Party control resulted in more, not less coercion."
- p. 60: The last five footnotes in the text were mis-numbered and the footnotes themselves were dropped from the last page of the footnote section. These should be corrected as follows:  
footnote 43 (46 in text): Walker, *Planning*, pp. 81-82.  
footnote 44 (47): Franz Schurmann, "China's New Economic Policy—Transition or Beginning", in Roderick Mac Farquhar, *China Under Mao: Politics Takes Command*, Cambridge, Mass. 1966, pp. 211-237; and Richard Baum, *Prelude to Revolution: Mao, the Party and the Peasant Question, 1962-1966*, New York 1975, pp. 11-21 and passim.  
footnote 45 (48): Charles Hoffmann, *Work Incentive Practices and Policies in the People's Republic of China, 1953-1965*, Albany 1967, pp. 103-107.  
footnote 46 (49): Quoted in Victor Nee and James Peck (eds.), *China's Uninterrupted Revolution*, New York 1973, p. 121.  
footnote 47 (50): On the transformation of the Party in the early 1950's, see Ezra F. Vogel, "From Revolutionary to Semi-Bureaucrat: The 'Regularisation' of Cadres", *China Quarterly* no. 29 (Jan.-Mar. 1967), pp. 36-60.



## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To The Editor:

The Editors, authors of "Poland 1980" (*Against the Current*, Winter 1981, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 4-11), say that the crisis in Poland reflects systematic conflict between the working class and "the ruling bureaucracy," and that it is working-class alienation from the bureaucracy's system of production that is "at the root of the problems of Polish economy and the source, in turn, of the repeated working class rebellion." Yet they also tell us that Poland entered the international capitalist economy just as that economy was going into crisis, that "that crisis in turn was projected into Poland," and that "it was the cuts in living standards—needed to pay the banks—which . . . triggered the August strikes." What, then, is at the root of the problems and crisis in Poland?

The Editors say that the system in Poland "has suffered the most extreme disruption precisely because of its inability to win the commitment of the working class and because of its inability to plan." Yet they call the Polish economy "a planned economy" and state that the projection of capitalist economics and crisis into Poland "made a mockery of Poland's attempt to plan and . . . triggered the August strikes."

The Editors assert that the Polish economy, because it is not socialist, but "bureaucratic," failed to "produce" during the 1960s: "the overall rate of growth in the economy allowed only a slight increase in consumption" and "real wages grew at less than 1% a year." Yet the '60s was a period of concentration on the development of heavy industry: in 1971, Polish economic planning called for a shift in emphasis to housing and consumer goods production, and according to the World Bank, Poland's average annual rate of economic growth from 1960-1978 was 5.9%.

The Editors claim that on account of this "failure" and the 1970 strikes, the government of Poland had to seek "massive entry into the [capitalist] world market." Yet they recognize that "there are . . . vast pressures on the economies of Eastern Europe to participate in the world market," to fail to do so would necessarily result in "extremely inefficient production," and "to insist on self-sufficiency (autarky) is to court disaster." So, in the 1970s Poland necessarily sought to further industrialize by importing advanced technology from capitalist markets. This phase of its industrialization went well—in large part because of the rising productivity of Polish workers—and trade grew rapidly with Comecon and with the capitalist world. But in the mid-'70s, capitalist recession, inflation, and protectionism began to interfere with Poland's ambitious and creative program.

The Editors, however, believe that because "the Polish bureaucrats, like their Russian and Chinese counterparts . . . are far from seeking to encourage and support international revolution as part of a strategy for resolving their economic difficulties," they are to blame for their nation's predicament. The Editors condemn these communist leaderships because they allegedly "subordinate revolution to their narrow national goals." Why are the Editors incapable of recognizing the enormous difficulties faced by the parties in the Soviet-bloc countries and the People's Republic of China? The U.S. ruling class is rapidly developing so-called "limited nuclear options" and a strategic nuclear first-strike arsenal, which it has every intention of using when worse comes to worst for it. There is, also, the profound—and growing—conflict of material interests between China and Russia as socialist nation-states, a conflict which at bottom is conditioned by the continuing existence and impact of U.S.-led imperialism, but which has yet to be properly understood and explained by even one of the currents within the U.S. Left. There is, moreover, the absence of a mass socialist movement and leading revolutionary organization in the U.S., where—as everybody should know—revolution is most needed by all of the world's peoples. Under these circumstances, are we to blame the governments of the few socialist countries for holding back the development of revolutionary movements around the world, for instance, in North America? And should we be calling the goal which the socialist states have in common—their national and collective survival until U.S.-led imperialism can be overthrown from within—a "narrow national" goal?

The Editors know that "the western governments would like nothing better than the restoration of capitalism in

Poland," but they think it ridiculous of U.S. leftists to see in the Polish workers' movement "the spectre of the restoration of capitalism." They claim that the imperialists' strategy of undermining the Polish system through penetration of its economy lends "support" to the party and government of Poland; that Solidarity's strikes and other political actions, which have been brought on by the involvement with capitalism, are simply a result, and in no way a causal factor contributing to the deterioration of the economy, the strains upon Comecon, and the general political predicament in Poland; and that *there is no serious possibility* of manipulation of this crisis situation from within and from without by pro-capitalist forces. They make these claims even though: Poland is 90% Roman Catholic; 85% of the farms are privately owned and there are 200,000 small businesses; Poland was the first communist state to get most-favored nation trade terms from the U.S.; aid has gone directly to Solidarity from the AFL-CIO and other anti-communist labor organizations, indicating a likely CIA-Solidarity connection; the U.S.-controlled IMF is seeking even more control over Poland than the capitalist banks have today; as the *Wall Street Journal* has observed, leading members of Solidarity include Marxists, but also workers "wanting a better standard of living" and intellectuals "wanting to build democracy," along with "capitalists . . . right-wing nationalists and social democrats."

The U.S. ruling class is interested in instigating the collapse of the Polish economy and has been decidedly interventionist. U.S. banks have insisted that there be a recovery program 'in place' as a precondition for refinancing and U.S. firms have captured coal markets lost by Poland in Western Europe and Brazil.

The governments of the various socialist states "do not and cannot have a strategy in which revolution plays a central role" (the Editors), but not because they are "bureaucracies." Nor would Solidarity be any more capable than the Polish United Workers Party of contributing to "world revolution" or any less beholden to the banks or any less dependent upon capitalist economies. As Jan Rulewski, the chairperson of Solidarity's commission investigating economic reform has put it: "There is no program in Poland for developing the country . . . All the actions taken are . . . impossible to put into effect in the long run. There just does not exist a decent conception of what the economy should look like—even Solidarity lacks such a conception." (*Guardian*, 9/2/81) Neither the PUWP nor Solidarity can do our job for us. Unless and until we do here what was done in Russia in 1917 and in China in 1949, there should be no doubt among us that the socialist societies will tend to "sink deeper into the morass" of economic, and military, encirclement by U.S.-led imperialism.

Brian Guerre

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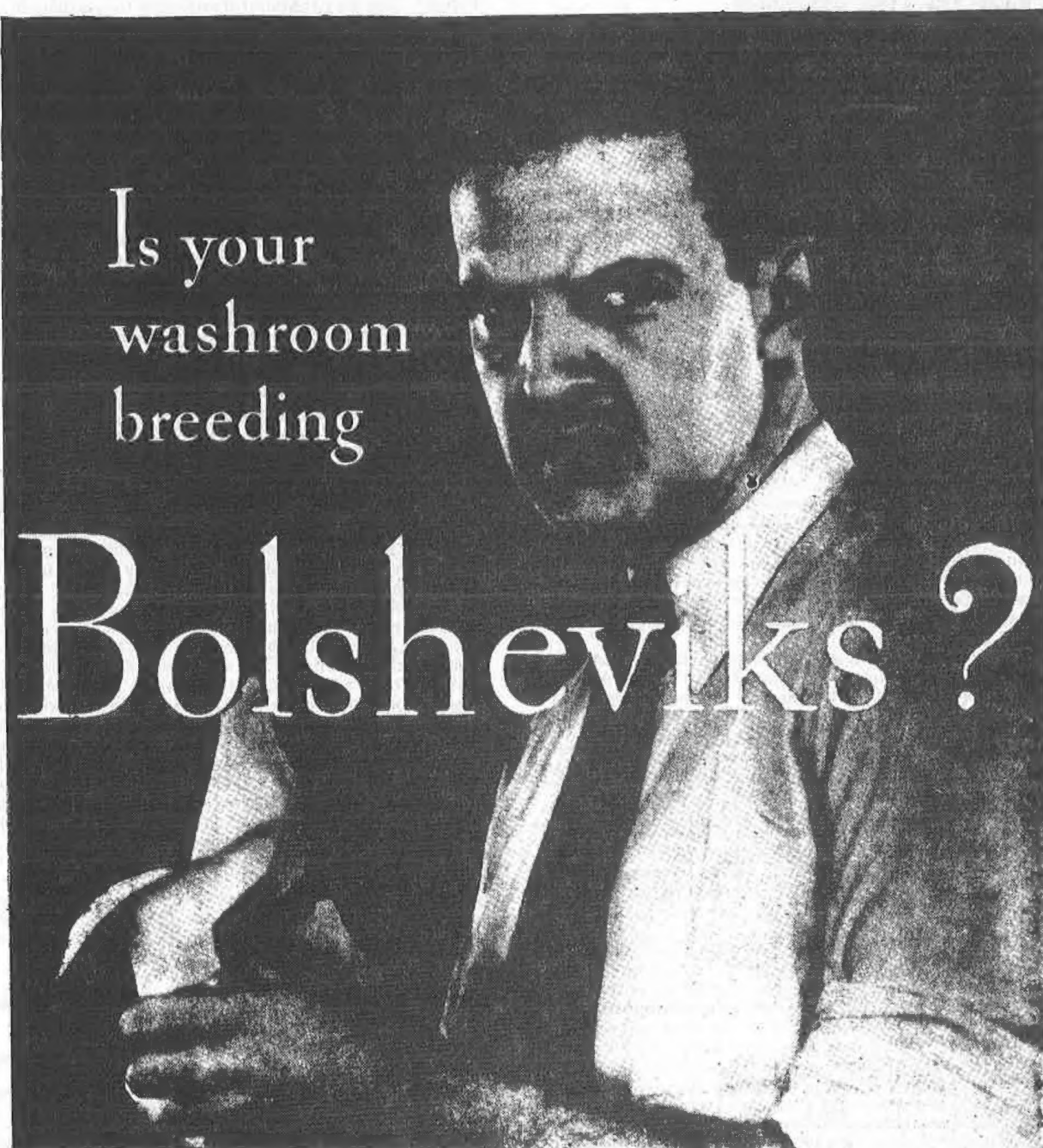
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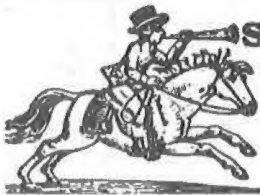
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